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# CHRISTIANCOURIER



## Christians in the crossfire:

### Radical elements of the Arab Spring threaten ancient faith

Harold Alkema

"We are waiting for God, waiting for victory," a shop owner in Daraya, a ruined suburb of Damascus, says, "but victory doesn't seem very close now."

The Arab Spring has inspired new hope for democracy in the Middle East. At the same time, however, the spreading revolt has also threatened vulnerable Christian communities in the region. The Near East is home to many Christian groups, but the number of adherents has been shrinking rapidly. Conversions to Islam, emigration, relatively low birth rates and violence from extremists have all taken a toll. According to the Pew Foundation, the 13 million Christians in the Middle East and North Africa make up only four percent of the population there. This number represents the lowest percentage of churchgoers anywhere in any major global region.

#### When 'bread is a dream'

According to the U.N., almost three million Syrians (roughly one and a half percent of the population) are currently displaced within the country, and in dire need of humanitarian aid. Neighbouring countries Jordan and Turkey are being flooded with refugees – as many as 5,000 crossing the border each day.

"The situation here is getting very hard and critical," a physician told *World* magazine. "Bread is a dream. Gasoline is a supernatural finding. Many families are in bad need."

—Editor

#### War-torn Syria

Violence in Syria and other countries affected by the Arab Spring might further depress those demographics. Caught in the fighting between the authoritarian Assad regime and rebels, whose ranks include some radical Islamic fighters, many Christians have already fled to neighboring Lebanon. Others have claimed neutrality in the struggle, and some are reportedly fighting alongside Alawites loyal to President Bashar Assad.

The Alawites are a minority Muslim sect within Syria. The president and most of the political

elite belong to the community. Like Christians, Alawites make up about 12 percent of the population. Many believe that the majority Sunnis will take revenge on the entire Christian population as retribution for the limited support some community members have shown for the regime. If this occurs many more Christians may be killed or expelled.

When a church in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo was shelled by armed men on September 8, it heightened fears that Christians are already being targeted. Living conditions for all civilians are "worsening dramatically," aid agencies



Living conditions are "worsening dramatically" in Syria for all civilians.

report, "as it becomes harder to obtain food and escape fighting."

#### Dark days for Christians

In Egypt the radical government headed by the Islamic Broth-

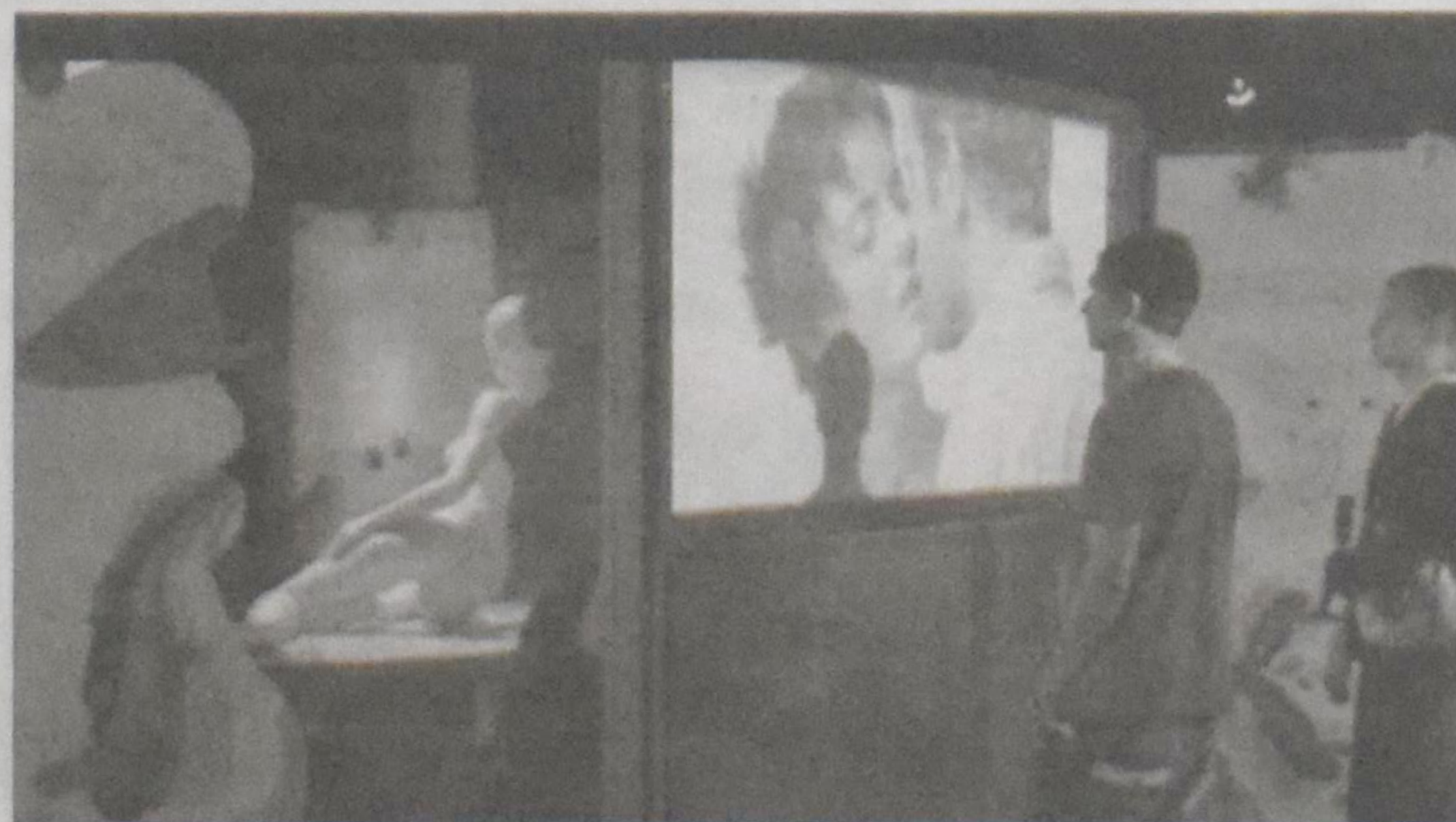
erhood and Salafi Party failed to investigate the fatal bombing of an Alexandrian church. Human Rights Watch confirmed that 17 people were killed at a demon-

See **Crossfire** on p. 2

## Religious freedom: defence is not enough

Kathy Vandergrift

Religious freedom quickly becomes a battle cry when there are threats to accepted Christian practices, such as Christmas nativity scenes in public places, the distribution of Bibles in public schools, or accepted norms for sexual behaviour. Appeals to religious freedom as a human right in Canada are made as a defensive shield to protect what we hold dear. It becomes a trump card to cajole politicians into action or to persuade courts that religious freedom is more important than any other human right. Most politicians want to avoid messy religious issues, so this tactic often works. In the absence of a threat to our religious practices, however, most Christians pay little attention to issues of religious freedom in



Should Christians present alternatives rather than try to shut down public exhibits, such as this Ottawa museum exhibit on human sexuality?

Canadian society, such as claims by other faiths or issues that involve the relationship of religious freedom to other human rights.

A defensive approach is inadequate, in my view, for our con-

temporary context of increased religious diversity. I wonder if it was ever really adequate. The legacy of a defensive approach is a low level of understanding what religious freedom really means

and a limited ability to engage thoughtfully in public discussions of increasing importance.

#### Proactive rather than defensive

There are at least three areas that require greater attention to deepen the culture of religious freedom. The first is to take a proactive rather than a defensive approach.

Defending space for Christian beliefs and practices will be more effective if we also actively promote space for other beliefs, including the right not to follow any commonly accepted religious beliefs. Canada has a global reputation for a high level of tolerance, but this is fairly superficial and often confused with multiculturalism.

Increased religious diversity  
See **Freedom** on p. 2



## News

Crossfire *continued*

stration protesting government inaction. A Coptic Church Bishop also accused regime security forces of watching, arms crossed, as Muslims publicly attacked a group of Christians. In Tunisia, the country where the Arab Spring began, two Christian converts were beheaded by an angry mob. Palestinian Christians in Gaza took the rare step of staging a public protest against the mistreatment of two community members who were forcibly converted to Islam and then held against their will.



the Saddam Hussein regime, however, they became easy targets for insurgents. A similar pattern can be seen in Syria now that Assad's forces no longer have the strength to protect Christians and other minorities in the face of growing resistance.

## Christian exodus

Many Egyptian Christians have already made the decision to leave. "If people try to rule the country with the Qu'ran, with Sharia law, that means they look to us as second-class people," says



Refugees flee Syria's civil war.

Three-quarters of Iraq's Christians have fled the country since the U.S. invasion began nine years ago. Prior to the war, Iraq was home to 1.5 million Christians. Without the protection of



Archeologists may have found the ancient Christian city of Hira in Iran.

Mina Bools, a Coptic Christian who fled to the United States.

Interestingly, all this is taking place while archeological excavations in Iraq are helping to uncover the 1,700 year-old legacy of Christianity in ancient Mesopotamia. At a site near the Najaf Airport, Iraqi archeologist Ali Al-Fatli believes that he has found the remains of a delicately carved church that could be part of the ancient Christian center of Hira, founded in 270 AD. The find shows that Christianity predates Islam in the region by centuries.

In spite of its longevity, Christian communities may find it difficult to endure in the Middle East, especially now that they are the victims of discrimination and violence. Some Christians have been drawn into battle to defend authoritarian regimes, and many more have been expelled, by choice or force, from their ancestral homes. Increasingly, it seems that a divided world at war is unwilling to tolerate the followers of the Prince of Peace. ➤

Harold Alkema lives in Ottawa, where he studies public policy.



A Syrian woman carries her infant and laundry at Zaatari refugee camp in Mafraq, Jordan.

## World Renew: how to help

Some Christians in Syria have expressed that they feel abandoned by the Church in the West. Because of this, World Renew/CRWRC has chosen to respond through [local] churches. Not only will churches enhance their witness, but their compassion will give them a place in society – regardless of what happens.

World Renew's partner organization has now established two channels to reach affected populations inside Syria with urgently needed food, medical supplies and other forms of assistance. One is in the Damascus area, and another is in and around Tartous (Tarsus) and Wadi Nasara (Christian Valley) west of Homs. Our partner has also just identified some potential channels in Aleppo that could be utilized to provide desperately needed assistance to those impacted by the fighting.

Please continue to pray for Syria. Pray that the leaders both inside and outside of Syria will find a way to move towards negotiation and away from armed conflict.

Gifts marked "Syria Conflict 2012" can be sent to CRWRC's head office in Burlington.

— from the World Renew/CRWRC Newsroom

Freedom *continued*

tests the easy accommodations in our past. We can no longer simply assume that Christian norms will or should prevail. Some attempts to do so may be counter-productive. The recent attempt to shut down an exhibition on sexual reproduction at the National Museum of Science and Technology, for example, because it does not reflect Christian norms for sexual relations, is likely to do more harm than good for the goal of respect for religious values. It would be more effective to focus on positively and publicly communicating a Christian approach, building on the exhibit's well-balanced presentation of information that young people need to know.

The features of a society that takes religious diversity and religious freedom seriously are described in international guidelines. They include encouraging dialogue between religious groups and the state on social issues and political life; restricting the state from using religion for political advantage, to pursue inappropriate nationalist goals or for war propaganda; and allowing religious groups to structure their own internal affairs, educate their children and form and direct charitable enterprises to meet the needs of their members and others. Furthermore, individuals have the freedom to follow a religion, or not, and to change religions if they desire. Dispute resolution tribunals and courts can be accessed to resolve disputes between religious groups and the state or between individuals and religious groups. And objections of conscience are recognized and accommodated in relation to military service, for example, or medical treatments such as vaccinations and blood transfusions. We have some of these good practices in Canada, but we could do much more, especially in the areas of dialogue and non-adversarial mechanisms for dispute resolution.

Developing new approaches may mean giving up some privileges Christians have had as the dominant faith in exchange for a more genuine pluralism. Promoting religious dialogue, for example, might be more effective than



Will a Marois PQ government push for its proposed Charter of Secularism, which exempts the cross as a cultural symbol rather than a religious one?

maintaining a privileged position for Christian traditions. Christians from the Reformed tradition may be well-placed to advance a more genuine religious pluralism in Canada.

## Not a trump card

Religious freedom needs to be integrated with other human rights rather than used as a trump card over other rights. If we believe that all people are created by God and therefore deserve to be treated with dignity, then other rights deserve equal attention, even when they come into tension with the right to religious freedom. For example, we need to resolve the tensions between the right of young people to be informed about matters that affect their health, and the right of some religious schools and health professionals to refuse to inform them about some aspects of reproductive health. All rights must be taken seriously without automatically giving precedence to religious freedom. Should forced early marriage of young girls be allowed because it is justified as a religious practice, even though it violates other rights of these girls? Active engagement by people who value religious freedom to resolve some of these contentious issues,

with equal respect for all rights, would add credibility to our requests for expansion of public space for religious practices in Canada. Religious leaders need to speak against the misuse of religious teachings to deny other rights as much as they speak up for the right to religious freedom.

## Distinguish between culture and religion

Lastly, it's important that we carefully differentiate between culture and religion. Cultural practices and religious beliefs are intertwined; confusion between them hinders the advancement of religious freedom. The proposed Charter of Secularism, which was introduced by the Parti Quebecois during the Quebec provincial election, illustrates the inconsistency that results from confusing the two. It would ban religious symbols in places where public services are delivered, except for the crucifix because it is a cultural symbol. That duplicity quickly drew opposition from every corner.

Defending cultural practices in the name of religious freedom loses credibility when other persons of the same faith have different customs. Cultural practices change – and those that violate the basic rights of persons, such as the rights of women, should be encouraged to change. As Canada's multiculturalism policy evolves, distinguishing between respect for cultural diversity and implementing the right of religious freedom will increase in importance.

Religious freedom sounds simple when it is used as a slogan, but it raises complex questions in practice. Current plans to promote religious freedom through Canada's foreign policy require a more informed and sophisticated approach to its implementation, also in Canada. Canada's ability to influence religious freedom globally will depend on how well we practice what we preach at home. ➤

Kathy Vandergrift is a policy analyst who focuses on social justice and human rights.





## Column

## From the Lab



Rudy Eikelboom



*Now there was a famine in the land.*  
Gen. 12:10; 26:1  
*As the LORD the God of Israel lives,*  
*before whom I stand, there shall be*  
*neither dew nor rain these years*  
*except by my word.*

1 Kings 17:1b

Water, its presence and absence, has been much on my mind in the last few weeks.



Corn was hit hard by this summer's drought.

For much of the summer, eastern Canada and large parts of the USA have been facing drought conditions. Large regions of Africa also are experiencing drought. The rain on which the crops depend has been absent, and farmers are seeing corn die in the field. My grass is brown, and even the weeds are not flourishing. Our denominational leaders have asked us to pray for rain, recognizing that appeals to our Lord are the only appropriate response to a drought situation: only our Lord, not humans, can bring rain. In western Canada farmers have had ideal growing conditions and are facing a bumper crop, largely because the Lord has provided the rain needed.

This summer we have also read that *Curiosity*, the Martian rover, is starting to search the red planet for signs that its surface once included water. *Curiosity*'s tools also are designed to seek the chemical building blocks of life. Scientists have gathered some evidence that in the long past, Mars had surface water. If it had water, life might also have been evident.

Looking at our planet from space, we see a largely blue jewel, reflecting the fact that over 70 percent of our planet is covered with water. Despite this, there are large deserts where water is scarce. One increasingly likely consequence of human-induced

## Water, drought and life

climate change is that deserts will grow as average temperature raises and weather becomes more extreme. While some areas will see more rain, most climate models predict that the interior of our continents will become significantly drier.

## To the last drop

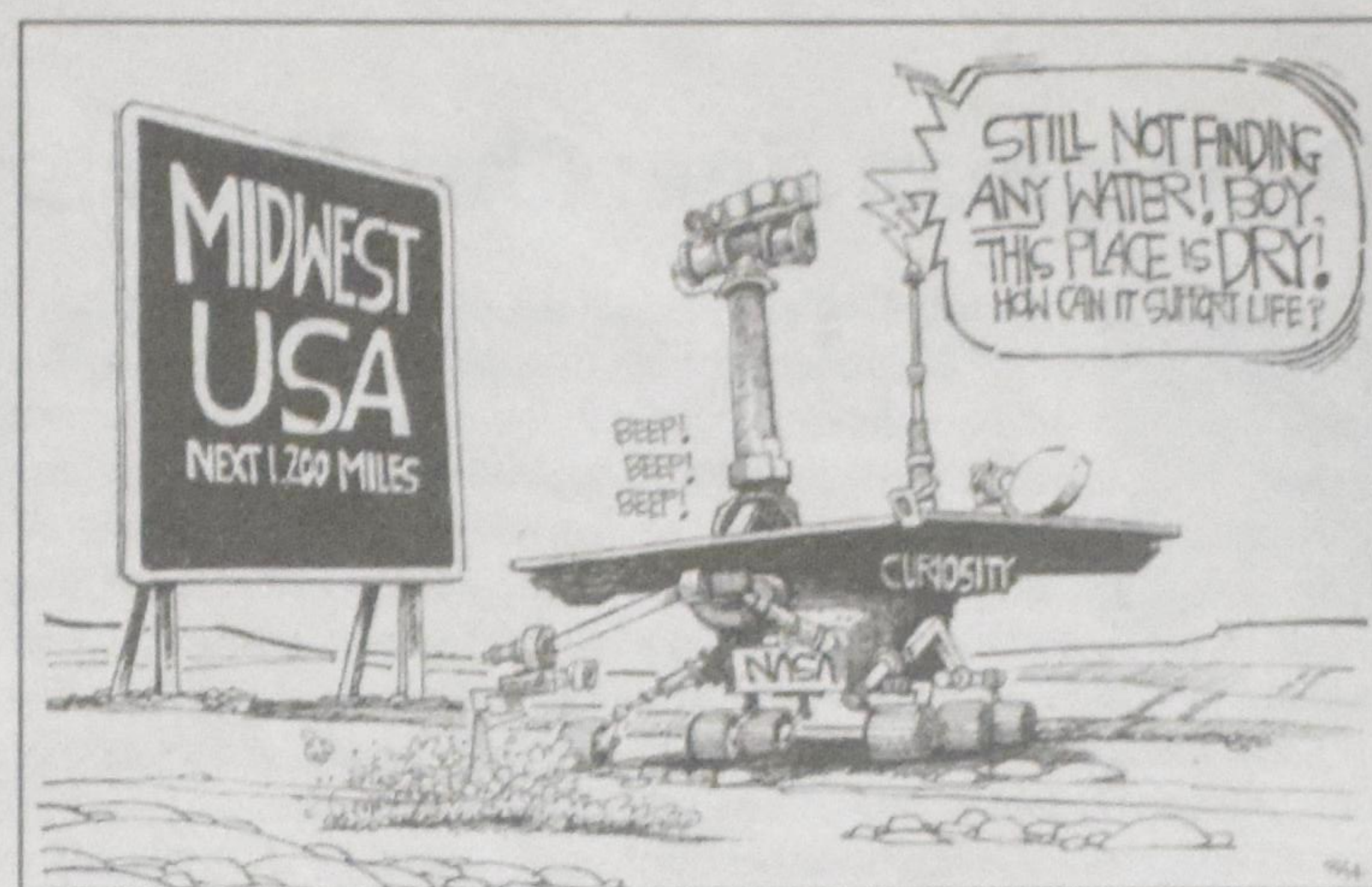
Aside from rains, the other source of water for consumption, irrigation and protection of the ecosystem is ground water. Success in farming in large parts of the world depends upon tapping the fresh water that has been stored in the ground over a very long period. In the journal *Nature*, a group of researchers led by Tom Gleeson from McGill report that our use of these sources of ground water is unsustainable; we are taking out the water faster than it is being replenished. For many people, food sources and one's very existence are being threatened by the need for water and its potential scarcity. This concern is in some ways not new. Abraham and his descendants had to dig wells, and to this day water is a source of conflict in the Middle East. What is different now is that we are depleting these pools of water, not simply using them.

At this point, all human effects on climate are unintended: we are causing planet-wide changes, but we cannot make changes that are desired. We are changing the weather, but the process is out of control. We have reached the point at which we can measure what is happening with our weather and predict likely consequences, but we are not able to control it. The gift of water is still very dependent on the providence of our Lord.

The sweep of history, as described in Scripture, demonstrates that periodic drought was common in biblical lands. Interestingly, in some cases drought is explicitly tied to our Lord's displeasure – such as during the life of Elijah – while in other cases famine, one of the consequences of drought, is described without any explanation; it just happens. Sometimes God prepares a way out for his people: think of Joseph in Egypt. At other times, biblical figures such as Abraham make their own decisions about how to deal with a drought.

I don't know how our current drought fits into God's plans. For today, the Lord's Prayer petition "Give us this day our daily bread" speaks directly to the reality that food comes from God's hands despite our picking it up in the local supermarket. Let us pray not just for food but also for the rains that are necessary for the wellbeing of our world.

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca), who waters his garden when water restrictions permit, is a member of the Waterloo CRC and Chair of the Psychology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University.



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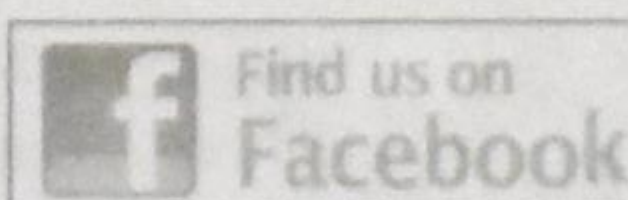
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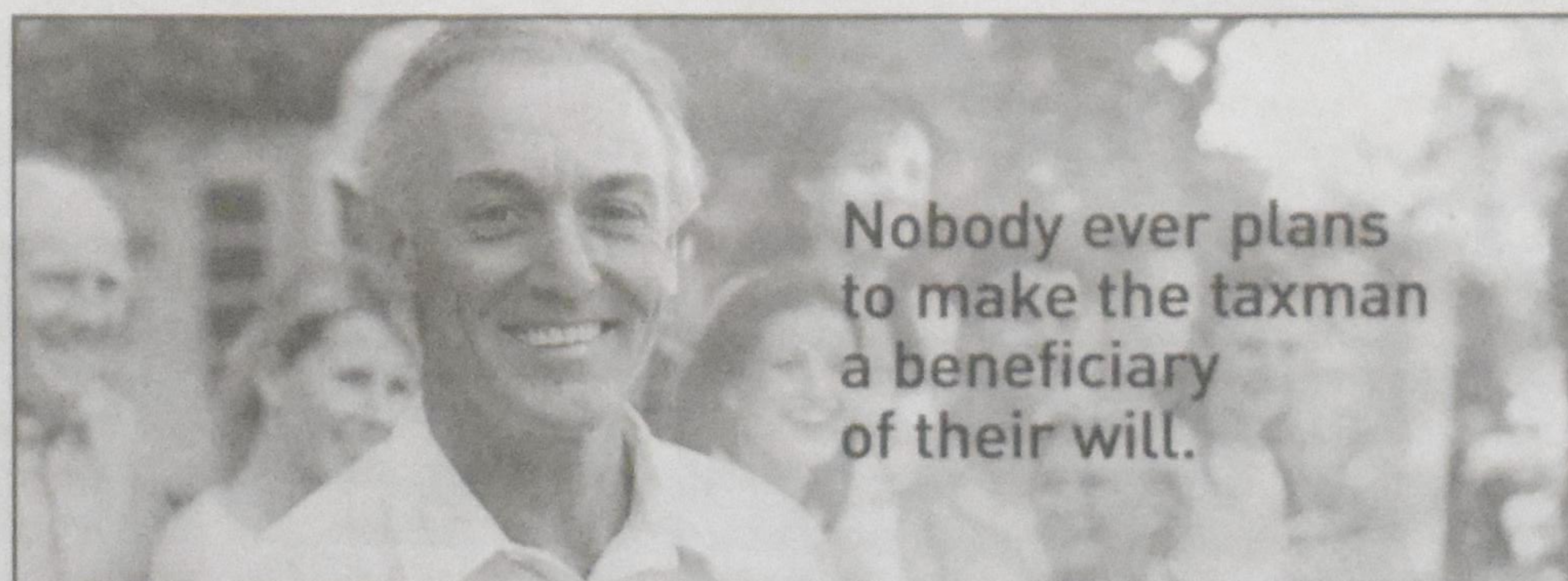
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## Editorials

## Diving in online: Christians and social media



Nandy Heule

Other than my own mother, she is one of the only people in the world who has remembered my birthday since my birth.

Tante Truus, my maternal aunt, sends me a birthday card every year in January. That is, until last year. Rather than seeing my name and address on an envelope in the post – written in the cursive handwriting I instantly recognize – I opened my Outlook Inbox shortly after New Year and noticed a message from *van Schuylenburg 2555ji80@hetnet.nl*. Not quite as charming, but lovely nevertheless: once more my 85-year old aunt told me in a short email that she loves me and prays for me.

In 2010, a study released by the highly respected Pew Research shows a dramatic increase in the use of the Internet among older adults. More recent updates indicate one in three seniors who access the Internet also use social media websites such as Facebook and LinkedIn. Half of adults ages 65 and older are now online, reports Steve Olenski at the website [socialmediatoday.com](http://socialmediatoday.com).



Online tools such as sermon podcasts offer enormous potential for Christians.

The Internet makes it easy to instantly share photos and messages with friends and family; talk to and see grandchildren, sometimes half a world away, on SKYPE; and stay in touch with those we care about the most.

Yet, for all its potential advantages, social media seem mysterious and even scary to those who haven't grown up with it.

A grandmother recently told me her daughter-in-law, who is an at-home mother and active on Facebook during the day, seems to be competing with the grandmother's employed daughter when it comes to keeping up with the latest news about the daughter's teenage son.

The daughter-in-law follows her nephew's escapades on Facebook. That's not something his mother, at work all day as a teacher, has the opportunity to do. Moreover, her son probably wouldn't want to "friend" his mom.

Let's be clear about it – most kids share stuff on Facebook they prefer to keep exclusively between themselves and their 400+ online friends, not their parents. Ever. Surprisingly, that list of friends may include a stray aunt or two.

## Ripple effects

Our kids start socializing online younger. Launched as a medium for the university crowd, and started by twenty-something power brains, Facebook wasn't initially envisioned to provide a gossip platform for giggling high school friends.

A friend of mine recently shared how her daughter's boyfriend was devastated when he learned on Facebook that his sweetheart had changed her "relationship status" on her Facebook profile to "single" from "in a relationship."

Personal information that used to be shared gradually over coffee or at a college drinking party now spreads instantly on virtual social networks. And, all these spontaneous, informal exchanges will be stored there in writing. Forever.

In the past, children may have been pestered on the school bus or denied a birthday party invitation. Today, a school bully with minimal IT skills can send a website link to an entire high school population to ridicule the unpopular child. Or, using a cell phone, a student can film a teacher who loses his cool in the classroom, post the video on the website YouTube and send it to everybody he knows, including hundreds of Facebook friends.

Too often, Facebook turns into a gossip mill on steroids, a massive chain letter with ill intentions that can spread instantly and at no cost.

And yet, these new online tools also offer enormous potential.

Christians have a long-standing tradition to use new technologies to reach out to a broken world. Think radio broadcasts into mission fields. Remember that Evangelist Billy Graham was one of the first big hits on television. More recently, studies show that mega pop star Lady Gaga, with 26 million followers on the website Twitter, has significantly less impact than American preachers such as Joyce Meyer. Meyer's one million online Twitter followers read and pass on her messages about God's love for a broken world.

## What is a Christian to do?

I'd say, show the world you are willing to embrace social media. We fear most those things we don't understand. SKYPE provides free long-distance calling. Online shopping is available to everybody with a credit card, including those who can't get to the mall due to physical limitations. Email saves postage and paper. Facebook makes it possible to re-connect to youth who can't tell you where to find a post office and have never used a pay phone. Church agencies such as World Renew (CRWRC) successfully use YouTube to share exciting films about their work. The list goes on.

I was delighted to discover my elderly aunt's forays into the online world. And, really why should I have been surprised?

Nandy Heule is a communications consultant based in Toronto. She can be reached at [nandyheule@heulecommunications.com](mailto:nandyheule@heulecommunications.com).

## The rise of Islam versus the growth of the mustard seed



Bert Witvoet

There have been times that I wonder why God allowed Islam to expand as it did through the centuries. I think of Egypt and Asia Minor, which had a vital church presence in the early centuries after Christ. Islam didn't even exist before 610 after Christ. But since then, it took

over much of the Arab world and beyond, around the Mediterranean Sea as well as into Africa. In the last few decades immigration is scattering Islam all over God's acre.

I am not sure that my problem with God's providence is all that holy, mind you. For some reason Hinduism does not bother me as much as Islam does, even though it, too, is in competition with Christianity for the hearts and minds of God's image bearers on earth. Maybe I am concerned about Islam because it poses a greater threat to the security of the Western world and the democratic freedoms of various countries.

Just in Canada there are about 300,000 Hindus, mostly on the west coast of British Columbia. There are three times that many Muslims in Canada, and that number is expected to triple in the next 20 years, according to demographic prophets. Most of these Muslims live in Ontario, in and around Greater Toronto, but nearly every major Canadian city has a significant Muslim community as well. Worldwide there are about 1.6 billion Muslims.

When it comes to Hinduism, there are about 900 million Hindus in the world, of which 800 million live in India. So Hinduism is restricted mostly to one region in India, Nepal and Bangladesh whereas Islam is the majority religion in many countries. India is a democratic country, and in general, therefore, Hinduism poses less of a security threat to the Western world. But where Islam establishes sharia law you can kiss democracy goodbye. So there are all kinds of reasons why I should complain to God more about Islam than about Hinduism, right?

## Wrong paradigm

Not if I take the gospel of Jesus Christ seriously. Does the eightfold path of right thinking and acting in Hinduism bring us any closer to our Creator God than the obligations called the five pillars of Islam? Neither the eightfold path nor the five pillars solve the human dilemma of being alienated from God. What we should know from the promise recorded in Genesis 3 is that the path out of our misery is a person, the offspring of the woman, who alone can crush the head of the evil one. Christianity is the only religion that offers the sacrifice of the Son of God as the way, the truth and the life. The path is not a way of thinking, not an ethical choice, and not an obligation. The path is a person named Jesus Christ. That is what should preoccupy my mind when I reflect on the expansion of Islam.

A few weeks ago, our summer intern preached on the parable of the weeds. A farmer sowed good seeds in his field but at night an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat. The farmer's servants asked whether they should pull out the weeds, but the farmer said, no, lest they tear up the good wheat as well. The point of the parable, said the preacher, is that we must have patience when we think the kingdom is not advancing as quickly as we would like it to. The kingdom does not come in a spectacular way. The subsequent parables of the mustard seed and the yeast point that out. But what they also point out is that the smallest of seeds, the mustard seed, will become a tree, so that birds of the



Huge mustard trees come from tiny seeds.

See Mustard seed on p. 5

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## Letters

## COMMENT

## Belhar now on 'forgotten-shelf' as Faith Declaration

In Dr. John Bolt's article, "Guilt, grace and social justice: another look at the Belhar" (CC July 9), I am mystified at his analysis concerning the possibility of corporate forgiveness through the amazing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. In my re-reading of the Belhar, I find that nothing could be further from the truth of this possibility. The Belhar Confession bases its entire creedal position on the three basic biblical issues of the unity of the church of Jesus Christ, reconciliation (for the church in society), and justice (that we as Christians are called to practice). Indeed, our faithful God is the God of the poor – to me, this is such a basic biblical principle that we can readily recognize how this affects our daily calling for unity, reconciliation and justice in daily life. In no way is there some kind of attempt to cloud the issue of the saving event of Christ that can be transferred corporately to society itself in order to deal with guilt, grace and social justice.

Furthermore, Bolt's article ignores the Belhar's historical setting. Over the years, our three Forms of Unity (the Belgic, the Heidelberg and the Canons of Dort) have been evaluated and revised (Q/A 80 of the Heidelberg, for example), and I would regard the historical setting of the Belhar to be scrutinized in a similar manner so that all possible ambiguity can be dealt with. But the historical setting is important: apartheid in South Africa, and racial discrimination in many countries, including both the USA & Canada. The Belhar addresses this issue clearly and biblically. Could our CRCNA Synod in June not have recognized this and addressed it, so as to avoid possible ambiguity, as well as the possibility of "slippery slope" issues?

What I find very sad in Bolt's article is that the potential of working out a fine confession in an ecumenical and Reformed setting has been avoided, largely because of the issues he raised, and others raised at the 2012 Synod session. If we were to use the same scrutiny to our three Forms that we've applied to the Belhar, I think the Forms might also be relegated to the safe and avoidable forgotten-shelf of "Ecumenical Faith Declarations," as declared by Synod for the Belhar. For example, in the 1600s Dutch settlers came to South Africa with the notion of racial supremacy, based on the so-called teachings of the Canons, believing that they were God's elect and all others were reprobate and thus subservient to that false claim of election. How could we defend that? And when the Heidelberg addresses the question of the forgiveness of our sins through Christ's atoning work, could we not somehow use the answers given to interpret this as a corporate sense of forgiveness versus the individual application? Do these doctrines "... fully agree with the Word of God ..." as stated in our newly adopted "Covenant for Officebearers in the CRCNA"? It would be much better to state that these confessions continue to define the way we understand Scripture, and therefore are always subject to further scrutiny and evaluation.

I use only such examples from our three Forms of Unity to indicate that no creed or confession is sacred, but that they reflect what the basic biblical teachings espouse, and I believe sincerely that the Belhar Confession does this with integrity and without ambiguity. Could this mean that potential changes be made to avoid the misunderstandings that worry Bolt? Of course and without a doubt there would be full opportunity to discuss further how this Belhar Confession could have and should have become our fourth confession for the CRCNA.

*In his retirement phase Henry Numan serves as interim pastor at the Mundy Park Christian Fellowship (CRC) in Coquitlam, BC, a congregation located in Metro Vancouver.*

Mustard seed *continued*

air come and perch on its protective branches. And the yeast can take care of a huge amount of dough so that freshly baked bread will greet the hungry nations of this world.

Some of that wholesomeness came out in a story I read in the July/August issue of *Christianity Today*. In an article entitled "The Other Iranian Revolution" the authors tell how in Germany a nation-wide surge of conversions among Muslims from Iran is taking place. Many reports of Muslims seeing Jesus in their dreams make the rounds throughout the world (a news report in the August 13 issue of *CC* confirms this).

These reports address my earlier-mentioned concern about Islam in a heart-warming way. In fact, I am reminded of an experience I had in South Africa a few years ago. Alice and I were on a bus traveling from South Africa to Zimbabwe. Across the aisle an elderly but sprightly Muslim woman told me how she used to think that Jesus was a figment of the imagination. That was until Jesus appeared to her one evening while she was engaged in evening prayers. It was such a vivid encounter that she immediately realized that Jesus was real and that he was the Son of God.

The mustard tree is growing and the yeast makes the dough rise, until every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. >

*Bert Witvoet lives in St. Catharines, Ont., where a Good Year tire store was converted into a mosque some years ago. But Bert no longer argues with God about the threat of Islam, even though he used to work for Good Year Tire in Bowmanville, Ont., in the 1950s.*

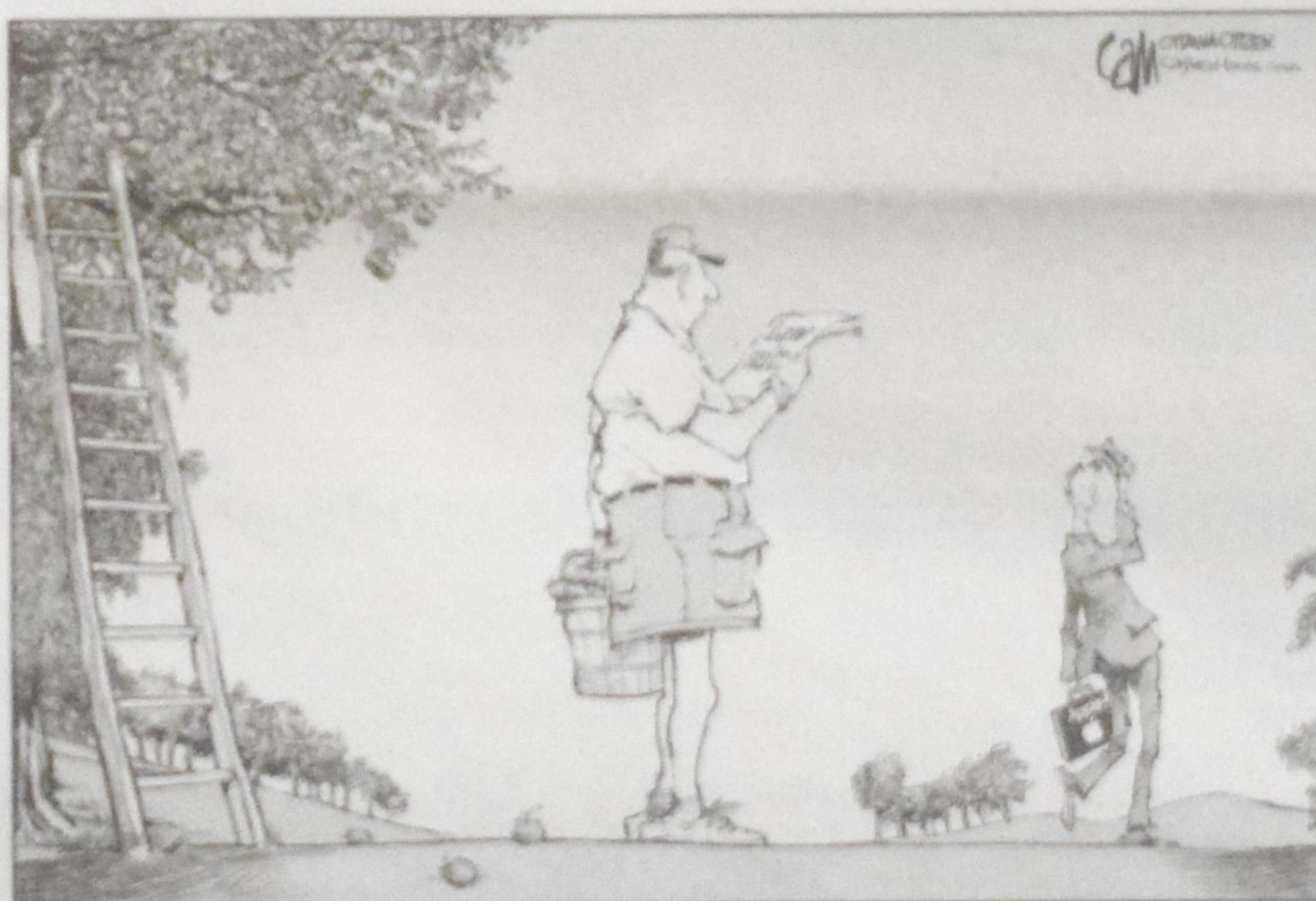
## The wit of a WWII 'Dominee'

I completely agree with Bert Witvoet's editorial, "A beautiful and ugly testimony of war" (CC July 23). I too sang songs like the ones he mentioned during the war, waiting for the odd straggler airplane [on its way] back to England, after they had unloaded their deadly cargo, while we kept ourselves busy jumping ditches. I knew *Dominee* J. Voerman of De Joure, as he frequently preached in Oosterzee when he was on the run from the oppressor. My father (1904-1989) knew him as a great orator about popular topics such as *twee hoornen en twee smeden* (two horns and two blacksmiths). He loved to speak for political audiences but also for provincial organisations. One such *Gereformeerde* young men and young women's organization in Fryslân forgot to pay him. He sent the organizer a postcard with this message: **Esther 6:3. From J. Voerman.** He got his money!

The best story, though, was when he preached in our church at the end of August 1944. After his sermon, he asked the congregation, "Whose birthday is it today?" When no answer was forthcoming, he said, "It is Her Majesty Queen Wilhelmina's birthday. So let us honour her, by singing our national hymn, *It Wilhelmus*, but with one correction. Instead of singing, *'ben ik van Duitsen bloed*," we will sing, *'ben ik van edel*" (noble) blood. When we came to the last two lines of the next verse "... *that ik zo vroom mag blijven, uw dienaar 't aller stond, de tirany verdrijven, die mij mijn hart doorwond*,"\* the tears were freely flowing, and singing became howling. At that moment, we were not thinking about the cruel deaths of women and children. God, forgive us.

Leffert (Lex) Smid  
Abbotsford, B.C.

\*"That I may follow my conscience, and your servant ever be,  
to drive away the tyranny, that has entangled my heart."



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## News

## Ontario: Case against Gideon Bibles to be heard by rights tribunal

ST. CATHERINES, Ontario (LSN)—The Ontario Human Rights Tribunal has agreed on Sept. 5 to hear a complaint by a Niagara-region parent who objected to the availability of Gideon Bibles at his daughter's school.

In 2010 Rene Chouinard took issue with the District School Board of Niagara (DSBN) when his grade five daughter brought home a slip which would allow the Gideons to give the girl a Bible with parental permission.

The Gideons, based in Nashville, Tennessee, are perhaps best known for placing Bibles in hotel rooms, but they have also been placing Bibles (New Testament plus the Psalms and Proverbs) in Canadian public schools since 1936. Gideon Bibles have been made available in Niagara schools since 1964.

Chouinard, a self-professed secular humanist, challenged the board's policy of allowing Christian material to be given to students. He demanded that he be allowed to distribute two humanist books titled *Just Pretend: A Freethought Book for Children* and *Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist* to the grade five students of Nelles School in Grimsby, where his children attend.

### Provoking censure

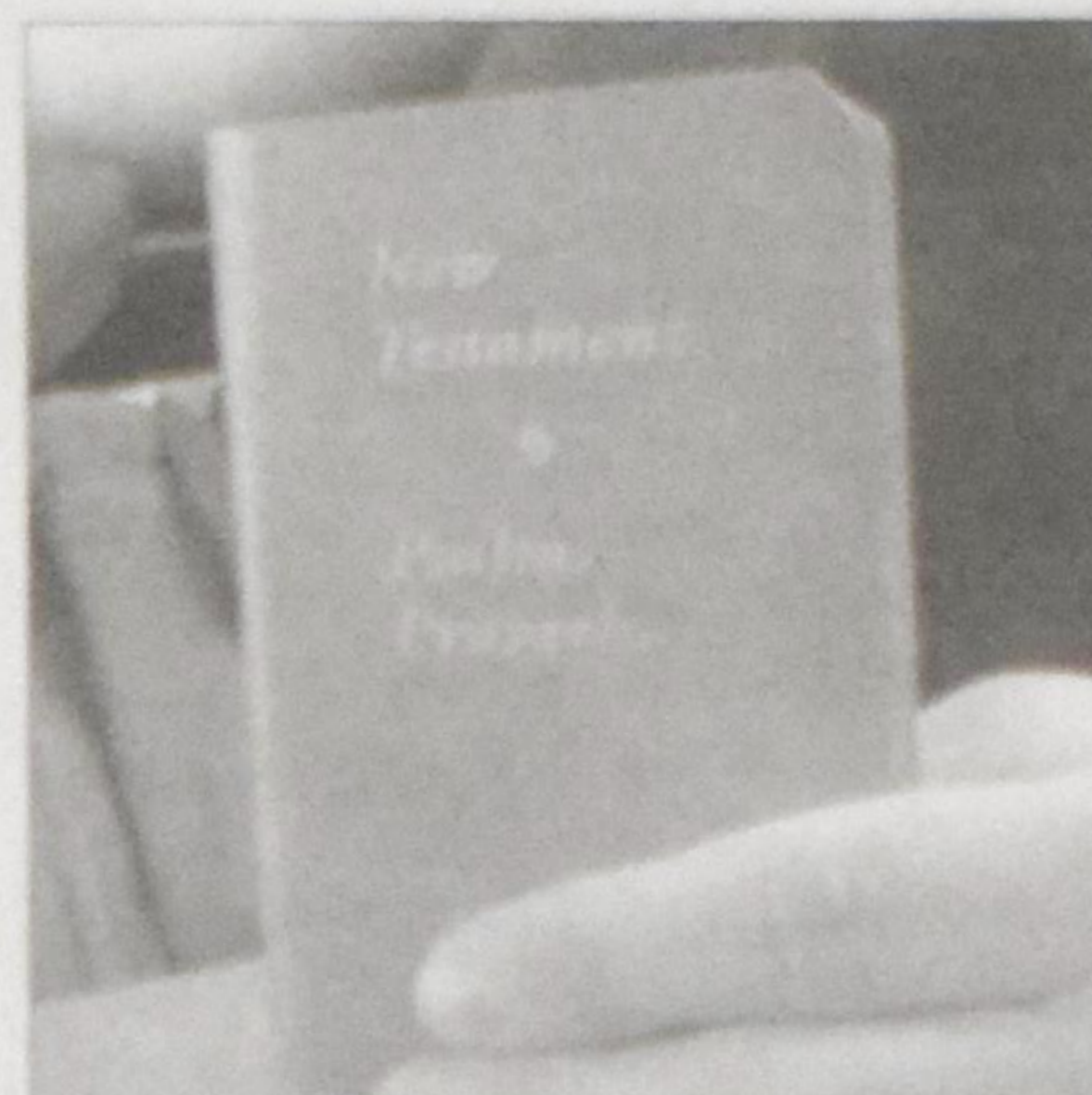
Chouinard told media at the time that his intent was not to actually give the books to students but to provoke a situation in which the board would be forced to censure the

Gideon Bibles. "It was just so we would have some evidence that [the school board] is not being neutral," he said.

In response to Chouinard's demand, in March 2010 the DSBN amended its policy regarding the distribution of religious materials by inviting other religions to offer religious books to students, with the approval of the education director, principals and parent groups, and with the permission of the child's parents.

Brett Sweeney, a DSBN spokesperson, told the *National Post* that the board hoped the new policy would appease those who objected to only the Gideon Bible being made available. "I would be most comfortable saying that we make [religious texts] available," said Sweeney. "Nothing is distributed without a signed parental permission form." However, only Chouinard applied to have his secular humanist material given to students under the new policy, but his application was rejected.

Niagara school officials said they consulted the Ontario Multifaith Information Manual, an "authoritative guide for the management of religious diversity issues" that covers everything from Bahá'í to Zoroastrianism, to determine which religious books were acceptable, but as the manual does not include atheism or secular humanism, Chouinard's books were considered unacceptable. As a result, the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal has agreed to con-



Free Bibles banned for 'undermining the secular nature' of public schools.

sider Chouinard's allegation that he was discriminated against "due to creed." The tribunal hearing is set for February 2013.

### Again, just one complaint

Other Ontario public school boards have caved in to demands to discontinue allowing students to receive free Bibles. In April, the Bluewater District board, which has over 18,000 students in 53 schools in Bruce and Grey counties, crumbled under the pressure of just one complaint from a parent who said the distribution of free Bibles "undermines the secular nature" of public schools. An 8-3 vote ended the decades-old tradition for those families who wished their children to receive a Gideon Bible.

In June, trustees of the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board voted to ban the distribution of Gideon Bibles in their schools, citing a desire to bring the board in line with the Ontario Ministry of Education's "Equity and inclusive education strategy." Critics have called the equity policy "a program of child indoctrination" that "represents a frontal assault on the moral & religious values of a majority of parents, and a trampling of their parental rights." The strategy was launched by the McGuinty government in April 2009, and has also recently mandated a requirement that all schools, public and Catholic, include "Gay-Straight Alliances."

School boards in Toronto, Peel, Durham, York and Waterloo counties have also banned Gideon Bibles.

The Gideons have responded to every instance of a school board banning the Bible by noting that their position has always been to co-operate with such dictates.

"We recognize that offering a Testament to students is a privilege allowed by school boards, not an inherent right," said Kelvin Warkentin, communications manager for the Gideons International in Canada, adding that The Gideons believe there is a place for religious study in public schools. "We need to teach our children respect for other religions and the best way to accomplish that is to make sure they understand them better," Warkentin said.

## Bangladesh: 300 Christian children abducted, forcibly converted

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AsiaNews) — In Bangladesh, 300 Christian children from Tripuri tribes have been taken away from their villages and forcibly converted to Islam. Local Catholic sources, who asked their names be withheld, told AsiaNews that the children have been taken to madrassas (Islamic schools).

So-called intermediaries, who are also ethnic Tripuri, visit poverty-stricken communities where they convince families to send their children

to what they are told is a Christian mission hostel. The parents are charged between 6,000 and 15,000 taka (\$500 to 1,300 Cdn) for school and board. But after pocketing the money, the intermediaries sell the children to Islamic schools elsewhere in the country.

The latest case involved 10 boys and a girl from Thanchi, Ruma and Lama in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Their story has a happy ending, though. After six months of threats and violence, the children were able to escape thanks to the Hotline Human Rights Trust, a Dhaka-based civil rights organization run by a Catholic woman,



Ethnic Tripuri live in the remote hill country of Bangladesh.

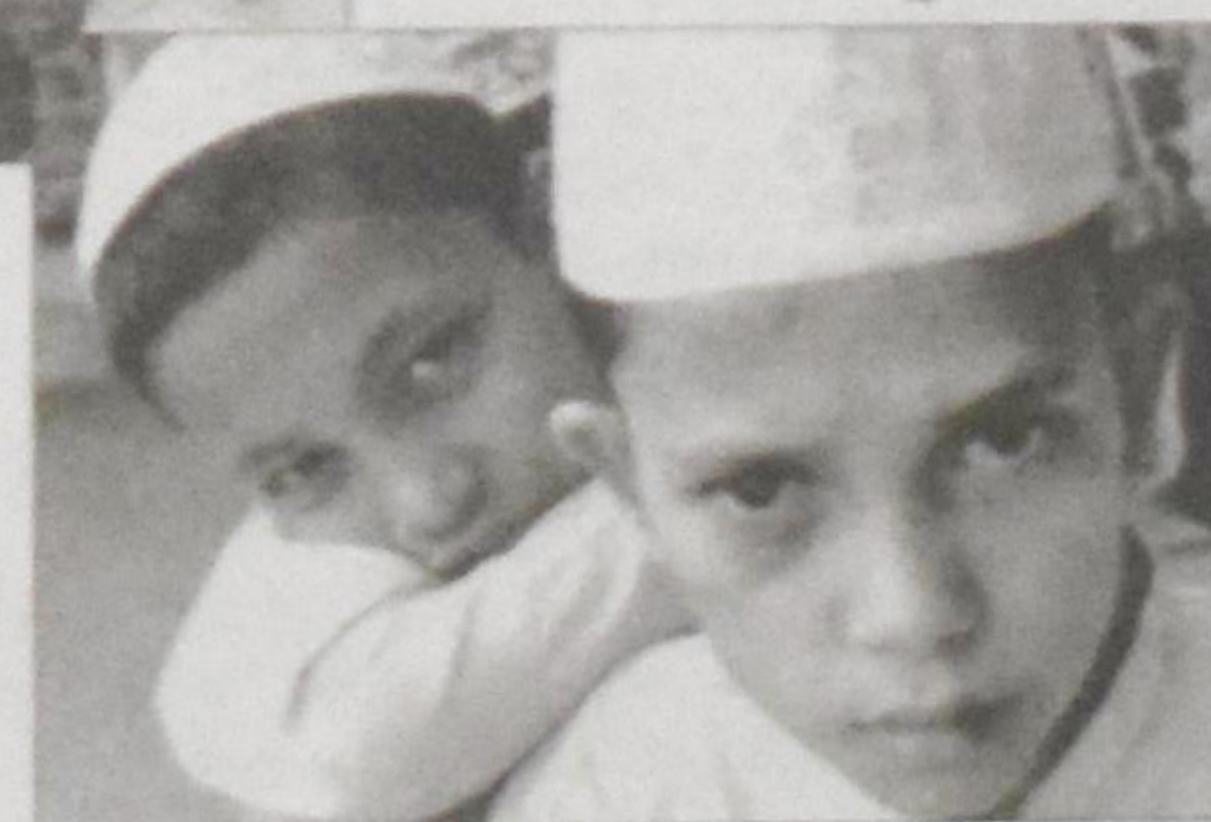
Rosaline Costa.

The Tripuri are one of the many tribal groups found in Bangladesh. Most are Christian — some Catholics, some Protestants. Radical Muslims, however, are engaged in a campaign against Christian missionaries, whom they accuse of proselytizing and forcibly converting others in order to create a Christian majority in the area so that it can be annexed to India.

At the Islamic schools, the Christian children submit to Arabic lessons from 8 a.m. to noon, then Qur'an reading from 2 to 5 p.m. — and five daily Muslim prayer times.



Poor children in Bangladesh are most at risk from traffickers.



### Escape

In their respective madrassas, the recently abducted children found other tribal Christians, many even younger than themselves. They also saw acts of physical violence when any of the abductees missed

prayers or refused to take part in a lesson.

In June, the 11 children in the latest case decided they must escape when imams announced that the boys would be circumcised, and that if they were ready to give their lives for Islam, they would be compensated with *beheshta* (heaven), since no other religion could lead them there. Scared, eight of the boys asked a Hindu family who lived near the school for help. They told their stories, asking the Hindus to contact their parents. When the parents found out what had happened to their children, they contacted the Hotline Trust to save them. Four boys escaped on July 4, the other four on July 13. When the other two somewhat older boys found out about their escape, they too fled and contacted the Hotline Trust on their own.

The girl's rescue was a bit more complicated. She was saved only after another girl escaped and told people in her village what had happened. The girl's parents then contacted the madrasa *hujju* (teacher), asking him to let her go. The latter said the father had to come and get her. At the school, the teacher tried to provoke the father, denigrating the Bible and accusing Christians of adultery and immorality. The father put up with the insults and eventually took his daughter home on July 13.



## News

## Spain: Pro-life walkers harassed by 'pro-death' Greenpeace activists

LEÓN, Spain (LifeSiteNews) – Participants in Spain's first annual Crossroads walk, a cross-country march for the right to life, were confronted with a group of angry Greenpeace activists, who were peeved by the walkers' pro-life position, according to Crossroads organizers.

In León, where they were warmly welcomed by the town's mayor, the walkers were passing out literature in the main plaza when they were noticed by Greenpeace members. Later, on their way back to the RV that accompanies them on their trek, the walkers were confronted by the Greenpeace members, who wore identifying vests.

Walking up to them, "one of the activists spat on the walkers, while the rest began to yell out insults," according to Spanish Crosswalk leader Jaime Hernandez.

The Crossroads members ignored the insults. "The Greenpeace activists grew even angrier; the sight of a group of pro-life girls which had lagged behind seemed to enrage them and got them to yell 'Long live abortion! We are pro-death!'" said Hernandez. One of them threatened the young women using the gesture of slitting one's throat with the index finger. At that point, Hernandez said, the walkers decided to call the police, who soon arrived and took down descriptions of the



Young Crossroads members get ready for their first pro-life walk.

Greenpeace activists.

The incident was the most troubling of the trip, which also saw graffiti spray painted on the RV and the lieutenant-mayor of the town of Tordesillas ordering the police to prohibit the walkers from handing out literature, according to Hernandez.

Spain's first annual Crossroads walk started in Barcelona on July 9 and ended on August 19 in Santiago de Compostela, the traditional site of the burial of St. James the Apostle, one of the most visited pilgrimage sites in Europe. It ultimately attracted 40 walkers, considered a huge success that Crossroad president James Nolan believes might explain the hostility encountered by the group.

Nolan says the incident indi-

cates that "the need for a Crossroads walk in Spain is self-evident," and said that more of the same could be expected in the future, because "young people are becoming more and more pro-life. The pro-abortion groups don't like that and we will continue to see this type of push-back as this trend grows. As they begin to see that they have lost the youth, they will become more and more violent and their truly radical views will become more out in the open."

Crossroads began in the U.S. in 1995 and has since spread to Canada, Ireland, and now Spain. It is a youth event open to people of both sexes up to the age of 30.

## Bob Rae: Canada needs 'liberal ideals' like unrestricted abortion

MONTEBELLO, Quebec (LSN) – During the floundering federal Liberal Party's Summer Caucus held in Montebello earlier this month, interim leader Bob Rae exhorted the 35 MPs and 40 Liberal Senators present to maintain "Liberal ideals," including support for unrestricted abortion.



Rae highlights "women's rights" over any debate about when life begins.

At their Wednesday planning session discussing strategy for their return to Parliament on September 17, Rae said women's rights should not be subject to a private member's bill, referring to that put forward by Conservative MP Stephen Woodworth (M312). That measure would have Parliament form a special committee to consider scientific evidence regarding the beginning of human life. The Liberals see this as ploy to introduce a debate on abortion.

"We are clear on this question," Rae said. "The rights of women to choose, to have control over their own bodies, is not a right which is going to be taken away by the Parliament of Canada, and it is not a right which should be subject to some private member's bill which is going to affect the rights of women to have choice, to have genuine equality, and to have full and complete access to the medicare and the health care that they need."

Campaign Life Coalition (CLC) National Coordinator Mary Ellen Douglas asserts that Rae has taken his staunchly pro-abortion NDP roots with him into the federal Liberal Party – and that he totally misses the point of Stephen Woodworth's bill. "The motion has nothing to do with women's rights," Douglas says. "It has to do with the humanity of the child."

She continued, "Even basic science tells us that life begins at conception." She called section 223 of Canada's Criminal Code – a 400-year-old provision inherited from British common law, which stipulates a child only becomes a "human being" once he or she has fully proceeded from the womb – "horribly outdated," and said the law "needs to reflect accurate scientific evidence."

Douglas remarked that the federal Liberals are not as much constrained into lockstep uniformity on abortion as are the federal Conservatives, and hopes that when Woodworth's motion comes to a vote, Liberals MPs will take a stand for life. The vote is currently scheduled for Wednesday, Sept. 26.

"Although the party is totally pro-abortion, individual Liberal MPs have a voice and the ability to speak out when a matter of justice comes up," Douglas said.

## Pope: Upholding ethical truths is not intolerance

CASTEL GANDOLFO, Italy (CNA/EWTN News) – Pope Benedict XVI told a group of his former students earlier this month that Christians should be bold in upholding ethical truths despite the fear of being branded "intolerant."

"Today, the concepts of truth and intolerance have almost fused together, so that to say that one has the truth becomes synonymous with intolerance. And we Christians do not dare to believe or to speak about the truth," the Pope said in his homily during a Sunday morning Mass at Castel Gandolfo, the Pope's summer residence.

The Sept. 2 liturgy marked the conclusion of this year's Ratzinger Schülerkreis or Ratzinger Student Circle. Since 1977 the annual event has drawn together those who defended their doctoral theses with the present Pope

during his years teaching theology at various universities in Germany. This year the topic for group study and discussion was the Roman Catholic Church's ecumenical dialogue with Anglicans and Lutherans.

According the Vatican Radio, Pope Benedict's sermon was based on the passage in Deuteronomy that reiterates how Israel received God's law. Benedict said the church as "universal Israel" must take joy in God's gift of Christ, the law made flesh – without any sense of tri-



The 2012 gathering of the Ratzinger Schülerkreis meets at Castel Gandolfo.

umphalism but with gratitude for a gift we did not create. We must learn "to allow ourselves to be led by the truth," he said, "then the

truth will be able to shine through us anew, for the salvation of the world."

The Pope asserted that "the

most important thing is that we listen to each other" since as fellow Christians we cannot create unity, which "is a gift from God." What can be done in ecumenism, he added, is to "learn from each other how to follow Christ today."

"That is beautiful," said Schülerkreis member Cardinal Schönborn of Vienna, "because it gave us such an input of hope for what we are doing with these dialogues that are often apparently without results – but if we meet each other in faith, then it is really a mutual enrichment in the faith in Christ."

Pope Benedict's 26-year academic career involved him teaching at universities in Bonn, Münster, Tübingen and Regensburg. He was appointed as Archbishop of Munich and Freising in 1977.



## Columns

## Flowers and Thistles

Curt Gesch



## Non-Sense

We talk a lot about bears where I come from, because bears are rather interesting, rather common, sometimes intimidating. Sometimes I am in deprived bear-less societies and hear people say things like this: "Ooh, I saw that bear on TV that was on that guy's porch in Banff." I reply, "Actually, you didn't see the bear or the porch; you saw only an image."

To experience a bear is very different from seeing an image on the network news or a You-Tube file. There is the *schlupp-schlupp* walk, the snorting, grumbling sound of one end and sometimes the gas-releasing sound of the other. There may be an intense, disgusting smell, especially if the bear has been "into the salmon." I have never checked out my sense of touch on a live bear because I can live with being deprived in that way.

Many children at school live in a two-sense world: sight and sound. "Interactive education" often involves just those two senses and – of course – the fingers on a keyboard, mouse, or pad. But no interaction with bears. Or bear manure, owl pellets, the grain of oak, the smell of burnt crankcase oil. Or being covered with dust from a pigeon loft, or even encountering barnyard scents, the stickiness of freshly-butchered beef, the bouquet of night-blooming stock or nicotiana.

As Richard Louv comments in *Last Child in the Woods*, "Much of our learning comes from doing, from making, from feeling with our hands; and though many would like to believe otherwise, the world is not entirely available from a keyboard."

## Beyond hands-on

When I taught grade six, I tried to involve all the students' senses. We took regular walks to the Bulkley River, had stone-skipping contests and built inukshuks. We investigated a beaver pond behind the local Canadian Tire store. Some of the students managed to fall into the pond and discovered leeches. We brought back "beaver sticks" – gnawed branches with noticeable tooth marks. Once the students picked up a bunch of strangely-shaped sticks and imaginatively made up an air band with beaver-stick saxophone, flute, drum, and – of course – guitar. But questions about safety, about insurance, about defining the experience in terms of "learning plans" made these experiences more and more difficult to maintain.

Master elementary school teachers Art Haverhals and Peter Rhebergen developed a school garden, complete with worm composters, and – eventually – several hens. Were there municipal or educational regulations against having hens on the property? I ask a different question: Why are there no regulations *requiring* students to work with soil, weeds, vegetables, ornamental flowers, grapevines, apple trees, tree swallows, stones and micro-organisms?

## Multi-sensory worship

Our best attempts at using technological aids in worship often fall into the computer trap, too. We use Power Point and other machinery to project words and images on walls. A visually-impaired friend said to me: "What am I supposed to do: climb the walls and read the words in braille? Give me a braille hymnbook and I can sing along." Christian worship has been designed to use more senses than two. Think for a moment of our sacraments and ordinances: the holy supper involves sight, sound, taste, touch and smell. Baptism ought to involve more than just the sight of water, too. At Telkwa Christian Reformed Church, we have temporarily installed a garden fountain: a small ceramic set of pitchers and bowls containing a recirculating pump. When I lead the children's lessons on baptism, I hold the microphone to the fountain so everyone can hear the tinkle-drip sound of water. One hot day I asked a young person to put her hand under the cool water to understand how water can be a blessing.

We have the examples of our Lord who taught using parables, anecdotes and real objects to demonstrate the presence of the kingdom. Jesus also touched people. Read the gospel record and you will be impressed, I think, how often we read of our Lord touching lepers, unclean women, mud-and-spittle, oil and so on.

Senses are a wonderful gift. Just the other day, after a couple years of watching our cows graze, I realized that sometimes the grass *squeaks* as the cows pull it out and rip it off.

## Gathering Light

Emily Wierenga



## Radical faith means choosing love



I tuck Kasher under my chin on the kitchen linoleum and we dance while the tea kettle boils. Outside my window I see an old man in a plaid shirt limping along the winding road. He looks so frail, like his heart is pulsing through the plaid, and I tuck Kasher closer. He still smells new, this baby of mine, like an unread book or an unworn sweater and I don't want the smell to fade.

I've been doing the mother thing too quickly these days. My patience has physically stretched so tight it's snapped, and I've had to bend low and apologize, and watch gentleness cross their young faces. Gentleness looks a lot like forgiveness. Kind of like a leaf unfurling in spring, when the branches are bright-eyed with forgiveness. If I sing a thousand songs and change a hundred diapers, if I read countless stories and make nutritious meals but have no love, I am but a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ...

Love is a cup of cold water in the green cup, not the blue, because you know his favourite colour is green. It is reading three stories instead of one. It is being kind when they don't make it to the potty in time. It is sitting and holding them longer than your schedule allows.

Love isn't us. It is God.

My friend sent me a card this week, with some photos of her pet lamb. The lamb is blind, and was rejected by her mom, so my friend took her in and raised her. And this lamb, Ronja, will never see her own loveliness, but my friend is there to remind her of it, every day.

"I find she turned into a real beauty," my friend wrote on the back of the photo. "She is still blind, but her crooked front legs straightened out, and she loves running and jumping too, for that matter. In the meantime, I bought five more ewe lambs and a ram. This way Ronja is not so alone anymore, and I started my own little flock, which reminds me a lot of John 10:1-21. I know my sheep by name, and they sure know my voice."

Love is being a mirror for our children. It is showing them they are valuable, and irreplaceable, and beautiful, when they can't see it for themselves.

## A Jesus-shaped hole

"That's where Jesus died," Joey says, pointing to the hole in the paper he's scribbled with markers. It looks like an orange and yellow explosion, like a daffodil torn apart. "That's where it's all empty and gone."



Love is being a mirror to my children, Kasher and Aiden.

providing covers for my book (which he did), people for marketing that book (which he has) and a publisher who believes in it (and so much more) and the longer I live, the more I realize how little life is about me.

I don't want it to be about me. Because that would be a waste of time.

"Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders work in vain," the Bible says, and I want to believe this in a radical way. I want to believe in a George Mueller kind of way, a man who founded an orphanage and refused to ask for donations, depending entirely on prayer. I want to believe in an Elijah kind of way, the man who called fire down from heaven. I want to believe in the widow's kind of way, the woman who gave all she had – two coins – to God.

So what does this kind of faith look like in an ordinary woman's life? I'm not sure, but I think it begins with choosing love. It begins with asking, *What is the most loving way I can spend my life?* Is it to market my own books? Is it to promote my own blog posts and websites?

Or is to trust God to do all of that while I care for the least of these? As John the Baptist prayed, "More of him, less of me." More than anything, I want to be holy.

I don't want to waste my life on me. I want to be his. ✕

Emily Wierenga lives in Neerlandia, Alta. See [emilywierenga.com](http://emilywierenga.com) for more.



Grass squeaks when the cow tears it from the ground.

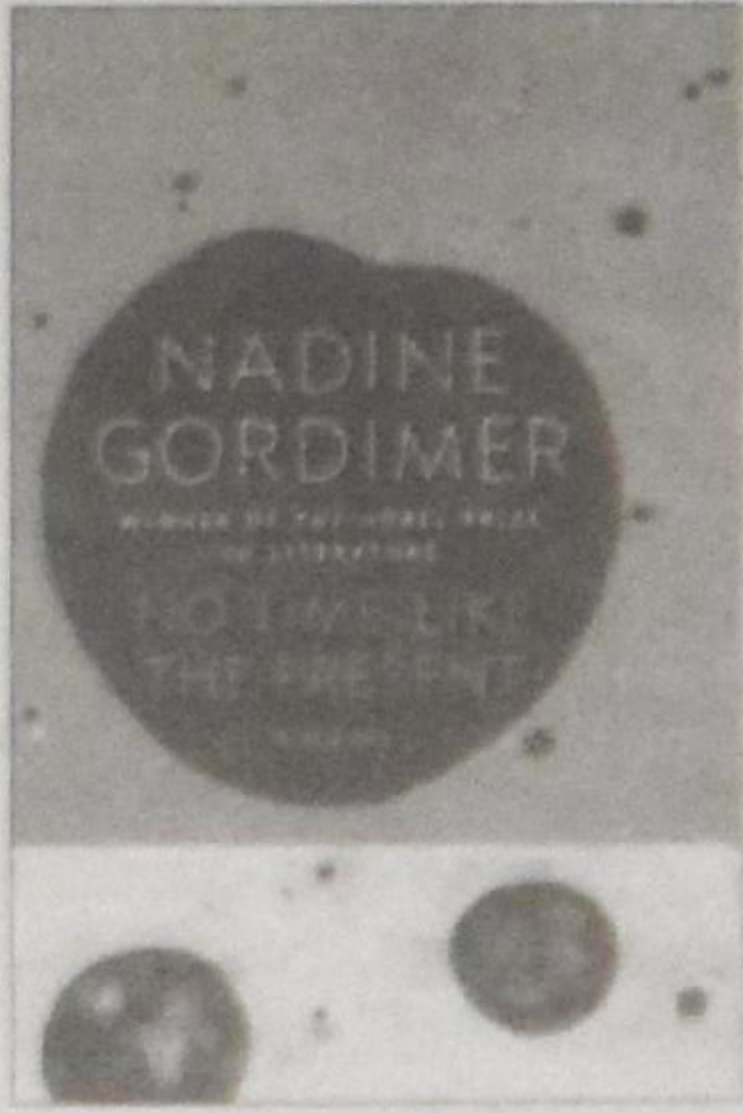
Master grazier, David Heidel, of Random Lake, Wisconsin, conducts pasture walks for interested guests, whether curious newcomers or professional dairymen. When he expects city-folk, he waits until they arrive to open a new section of pasture so that they can hear the sound of cattle grazing a lush pasture. In the process the guests may also experience the skin-destroying tongue-rasp of a cow, the feel of a prickly coat, the wetness of a bovine nose, the belches and the fertilizing *plop plop* of these creatures that supply us with dairy products.

It makes more sense than non-sense to me. ✕

Curt Gesch ([cggesch63@gmail.com](mailto:cggesch63@gmail.com)) is a mostly harmless fellow who likes to spend time watching and listening as cows eat and digest. He lives in Quick, B.C.



## Reviews



**No Time Like the Present**  
by Nadine Gordimer  
Hamish Publishing  
Hamilton Canada: 2012

## Reconciliation in practice

Kathy Vandergrift

The calling to be agents of reconciliation seems obvious; in practice, however, it can be more difficult than standing up for one's beliefs. South Africa is often held up as an example of racial reconciliation, but few of us really understand what that work means in the context of our own daily lives. Recent news stories raise questions, but the context is inadequate to fully understand what comes to us as short clips of information.

A new novel by Nobel prize winner Nadine Gordimer provides insight into the meaning of reconciliation in daily life. *No Time Like the Present* is a story of life in South Africa today, through the experience of a mixed-race couple who were united in an illegal, clandestine marriage in the midst of the struggle against apartheid. Now they face a different struggle: making real the vision of "A Better Life for All,"

for which they suffered imprisonment, loss of family and friends and psychological trauma.

Life is messy and complicated. Chemist Steven Reed, a university professor with British and Jewish roots, finds that bridging programs for under-educated blacks are difficult to implement and less than effective. Jabuile Gamede, who overcame racial and sexual barriers to become a lawyer herself, learns that changing laws is a slow process – and then there are the unintended consequences. Former freedom fighter colleagues are now corrupt politicians. In particular, Jabuile faces choices between family and her ideals when her father remains loyal to Jacob Zuma, the former guerrilla who becomes president in spite of evidence of corruption and lack of respect for women.

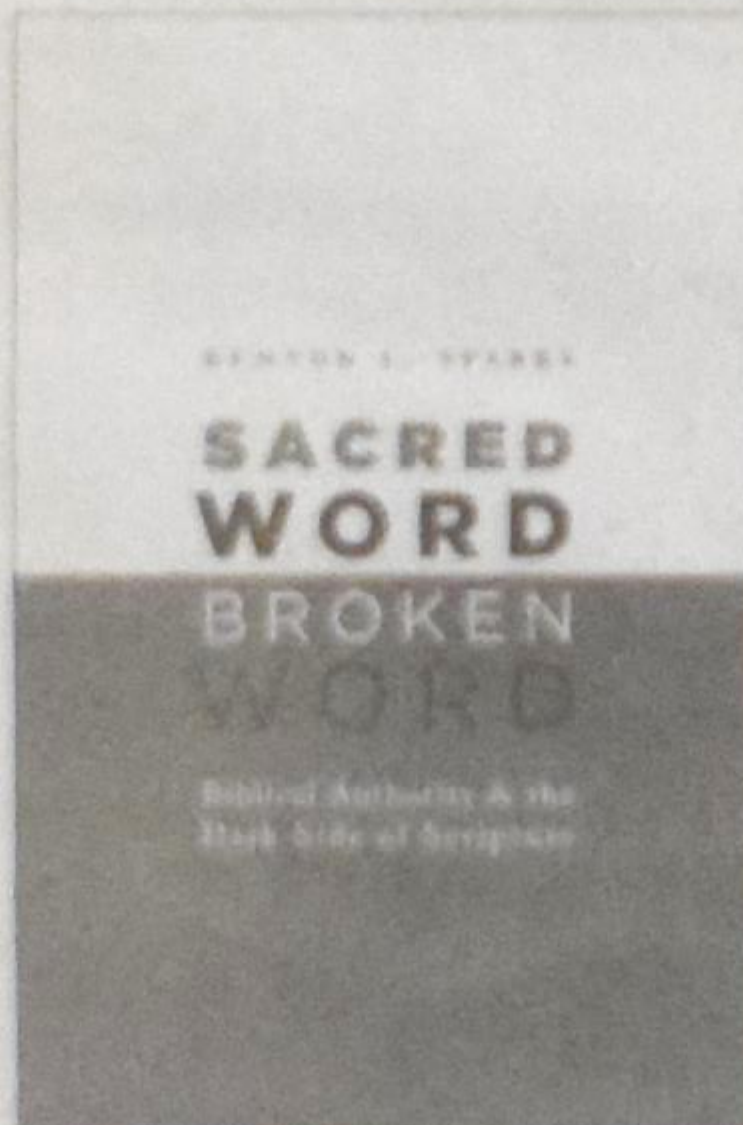
The flood of refugees from Zimbabwe creates tensions within the community that sustains Steven and Jabuile. There are no easy answers for poor people when their own survival and efforts to help their comrades in the struggle for freedom come into conflict over the lack of food and clean water. The new middle-class struggles with whether it is acceptable to own a home and send one's children to a better private

school, when former comrades continue in grinding poverty with no hope of improvement. Feelings of guilt and differences in how Steven and Jabuile deal with the moral dilemmas in their lives give rise to emotional tensions that threaten the solidarity that held them together in the face of death. Freedom raises questions and challenges that threaten tranquillity as much as the dangers of wartime. Despair drives them to consider moving to Australia, raising the archetypal question of what home means.

This novel is a good read. Gordimer integrates the political, social and ethical dimensions of life into her stories without interrupting the drama or becoming moralistic. She has captured the tastes and smells of daily life in South Africa in 14 novels and almost as many volumes of short stories. She writes captivating stories that take politics and religious beliefs seriously without reducing people to victims and villains.

This novel is about South Africa, but also has the potential to speak to any other society. The ethical choices that create tension in the lives of Steven, Jabuile, their families and their political leaders are ones that resonate around the world. The unavoidable interplay between personal choices and the shape of society, between home and nation, becomes experiential as the reader is drawn into the lives of Gordimer's characters. They want to live out the principles that we also cherish – freedom, living together in peace, respect for every person, opportunity to develop one's skills, care for creation. While the contrasts may be sharper in South Africa, the complex challenge of making choices that either add or detract from advancing these ideals is shared globally. The insights from Gordimer's story are deeper than we can get from reading news stories, and they are helpful for our own challenges in the ministry of reconciliation. The struggle goes on, around the world, even in Australia. ➤

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**Sacred Word, Broken Word:**  
*Biblical Authority and the Dark Side of Scripture*  
by Kenton L. Sparks  
William B. Eerdmans  
Publishing Company  
Grand Rapids, MI: 2012

## Reconciling Scripture's texts of terror

Nick Schuurman

What do we do with biblical accounts and divine mandates that seem to fly in the face of not only our current understanding of justice but also would appear to outright contradict portrayals of God and the Christian ethic elsewhere in Scripture? The list, while familiar, remains disturbing: texts that support slavery, regard women as property as second-class citizens, and suggest divinely sanctioned genocide, as was the case with the Canaanites.

*Sacred Word, Broken Word* is professor Kenton Sparks' attempt to bring a fresh perspective onto these "texts of terror" of the Christian scriptures. He is not concerned with the points of contradiction and tension that historical and textual criticism have uncovered in the past (the differences in accounts regarding how Judas died, or contradictory instructions given regarding preparations of the Passover meal, for example). These, which he refers to as "Scripture's human errors," are, in his opinion, "fairly innocuous theologically" (6). More troubling, and of greater concern and interest to Sparks are examples of "the dark side of Scripture."

His approach, while many will not agree, may find some degree of resonance within the Reformed community. Sparks posits that the Christian canon, while uniquely inspired, is no less a bi-product of the created order, and as such, ought to be understood within the categories of Creation, Fall and Redemption. And so he begins with the assertion that Scripture is both a source of goodness, and something intrinsically good in itself, and for that reason, ought to be treated with an "hermeneutical respect rather than suspicion" (11).

Scripture, however, Sparks asserts, is fallen and broken – "a product of and evidence for the fallen world that it describes" (46). In the same way that orthodox Christians would affirm that God's creation is good, but nevertheless includes evil, Scripture, he argues, ought to be understood as good, but affected by the fall. The blame for the flaws of Scripture, like those of the greater created order, is properly understood to rest on humanity, and not God.

The Bible then, like the rest of creation, is, as result, in need of redemption. This assertion is probably the one which students and readers will have most difficulty with, both in terms of the concept itself and the question of the way in which it ought to take place. The example Sparks gives of broken Scripture being redeemed comes from the



Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus' message contrasts the Old Testament law of Moses. Regarding three ethical issues (divorce, personal retaliation and treatment of enemies), Jesus either reverses or negates what was assumed to be divinely inspired, authoritative Scripture.

Understanding, interpreting and seeking to live in light of Scripture, then, requires a process of study and discernment in regards to which elements of Scripture retain the original goodness, and how those

that reflect its fallen nature are to be redeemed. This is where his argument, which was until now simple enough, requires a more complex and nuanced approach. At this point, Sparks opens up a discussion about Christian epistemology and hermeneutics. These are important, he argues, because the process of reconciling the problems of Scripture requires not only a detailed reading of the text, but an understanding of *how* we read it.

Does arguing the fallen nature Scripture and its need for redemption undermine its authority, and what of the question of its inspiration? In regards to the former, Sparks cites examples throughout Scripture of authority that does not assume perfection (submission to government, or a parent, for example), and understands the inspiration of Scripture to be a sort of human-Divine co-writing (which allows for error on the human part).

I have a professor who, when the class finds itself in the nit-picky business of discussions such as this one, has made a practice of saying something to the effect of, "this is all fine and dandy, but how do we take it to the pews?" This is a dense book, intended for academic discussion. The reality is, though, that the majority of people who read the Bible will not understand its argument. I struggled to myself. These are, however, the questions that so many men and women, believer and unbeliever, are bringing with them Sunday morning, and it is important to work through what a thoughtful, faithful, Christian response ought to look like. We simply cannot brush them off.

The image that Sparks gives early on helps. When I find myself wrestling with Scripture's texts of terror, its apparent errors and contradictions, I try and humble myself a little and submit to its authority, in the same way that I submit to the authority of a parent. ➤

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## Features



## Ode to the Broken Philippines Tour

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Idea-seeds can take years to germinate, put down roots and grow into something beautiful, a fact made evident by Soli Deo Gloria Ballet's *Ode to the Broken* production and subsequent May 10-19, 2012 Philippines Tour.

In 2007, Carolyn Currey and Rachel Starr Thomson, the ballet company's founders, came up with the concept for *Ode to the Broken*. Currey explains, "We wanted to do a ballet that would address different types of human brokenness, including addiction, abuse, abortion and illness, and that would clearly highlight the deliverance and healing available for all of those things. But we lacked the dancers to carry it off as we'd originally envisioned it."

However, when Currey and Starr Thomson met Mercy Hope and heard her story, they realized that it encapsulated what they wanted to communicate. So, they asked Hope if she'd be interested in contributing to the ballet. In October 2011, Hope flew to Ontario from her North Carolina home to assist in brainstorming.

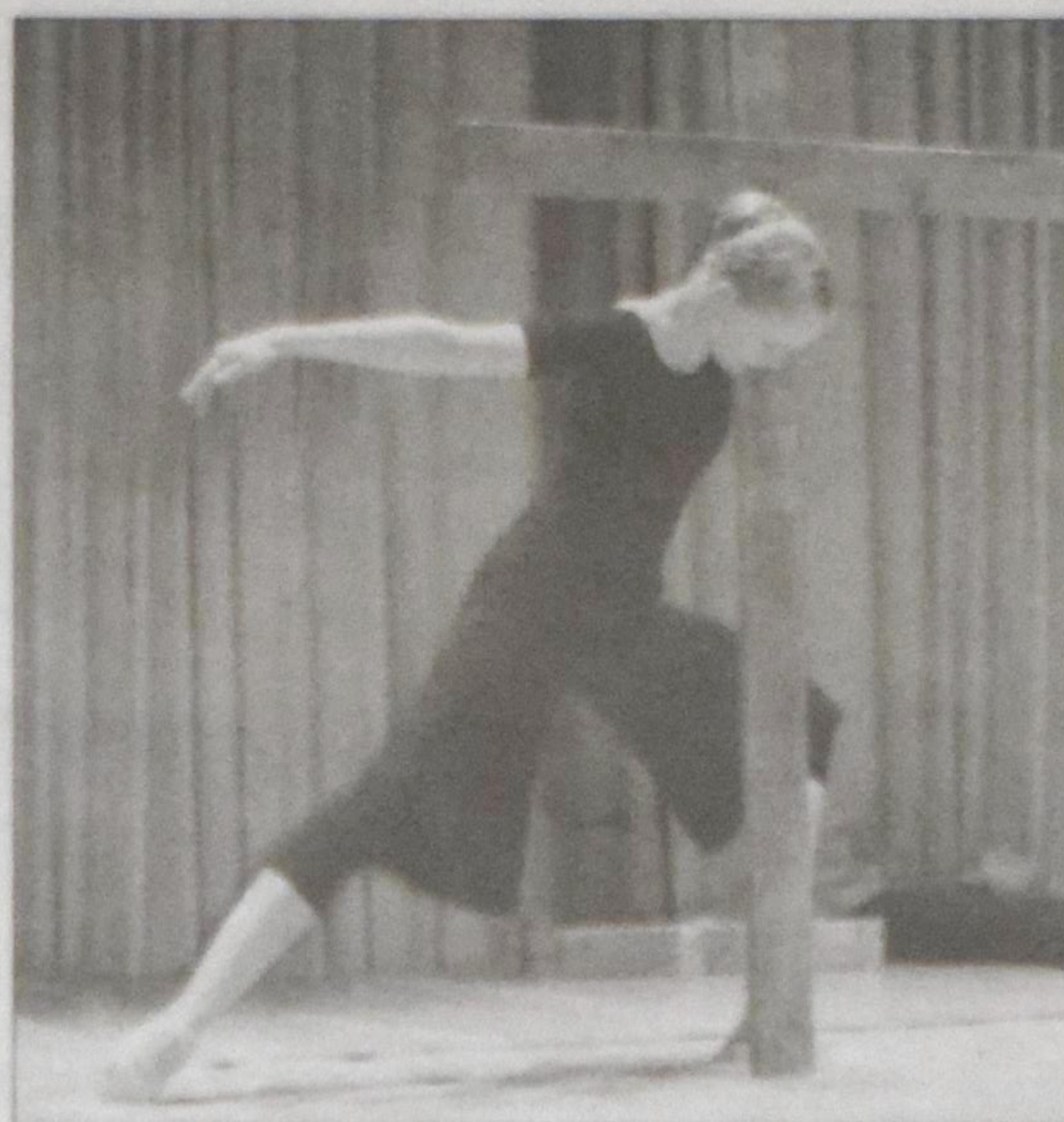
### A spiritually creative process

Currey recalls the process by which *Ode to the Broken* was created: "We prayed together over the music selection, choreography and speaking parts, but in a sense each of us worked on her own part individually. *Ode to the Broken* wasn't finally finished until we performed it for the first time in North Carolina in February 2012. Parts of it were still a surprise to each of us. However, we knew it had come together as something truly powerful."

Besides music that addresses personal brokenness and healing in Christ, *Ode to the Broken* consists of three components: dance, poetry/Scripture readings and personal testimony. Currey is the principal dancer. Starr Thomson reads poetry that she wrote herself and Hope shares her story of deliverance from poverty and domestic violence and her redemption in Jesus Christ.

Patricia Capwell, an acquaintance of Starr Thomson, paved the way for the group to take *Ode to the Broken* to the Philippines. The two women had met through Sommer Haven, a California ministry connected to the Institute for Foundation Learning (IFL) in Cabuyao, Laguna. Two years ago at a funeral, Starr Thomson reconnected with Patricia, administrator of IFL. That reunion led to the invitation for the Soli Deo Gloria Ballet to head for the Philippines.

IFL administers and oversees schools throughout the Philippines and parts of Asia. The IFL compound in Cabuyao consists, among other things, of a school and a home for dozens of orphans and children whose parents can't care for them. While in the Philippines, Currey, Starr Thomson and Hope led various activities with the resident children on the IFL compound, as well as several students from the community. Currey taught ballet classes for several hours each day, opening with a devotional time of



*Building Relationships (above left).  
Carolyn in Ode to the Broken (above right).*

Bible reading, discussion, prayer and, occasionally, music led by Starr Thomson and Hope. When the women weren't teaching the children, they socialized with them in an attempt to build meaningful relationships. Besides working at the IFL compound, the group performed *Ode to the Broken* in several Sunday worship settings.

Because this was the company's first trip overseas, the women didn't know what to expect. Still, they had clear goals in mind. Currey explains, "We know that any outside group is going to be limited in what they can accomplish by virtue of culture and language differences, and, of course, by time constraints. So, our goal was to encourage the people there in such a way that they could feel strengthened for the work ahead of them. As always, it's our goal to use the arts to bring glory to God."

### Art as ministry

After performances, the women prayed individually with members of the audience and spoke to them about their life experiences. Currey recalls how one woman mentioned that her father had died when she was very young. After watching the ballet, she realized that she could relate to God as her heavenly Father. Other people prayed for forgiveness and for healing, both emotional and physical.

The adults weren't the only ones moved by the company's work. Currey says, "Many of the children we worked with throughout the week came from abusive backgrounds. It was good to be able to speak to them through dance and through the relationships we'd built with them and say, 'You are of great value. God sees you. There is healing and hope for every part of your life.'"

Currey, Starr Thomson and Hope are realistic about the nature of healing. "Healing rarely happens in an instant," says Currey. "Sometimes things do suddenly click into place, but overall the process isn't a snap thing. We don't necessarily expect to see change after a performance. What we do hope to see, and what we often do see, is people with new hope, new courage and new understanding that this journey is worth taking. God has a plan for them that ultimately leads to light and to redemption."

Currently, the company has no concrete plans for future international performances and workshops, although IFL has invited them to return to the Philippines. Also, contacts in India and Central Asia are interested in hosting them in the future. Though no plans are in place, the women dream of performing internationally once again. Currey concludes, "But for now we are concentrating on the country we feel primarily called to reach: Canada." >

## Soli Deo Gloria Ballet at a Glance

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Carolyn Currey and Rachel Starr Thomson, adventurous young women with a vision to serve God in the area of ballet, established Soli Deo Gloria Ballet in 2007 in the Niagara region with a small tour of *Father*, their original ballet based on the Lord's Prayer. Five years later, they still call the Niagara region home, but have performed throughout Canada, in parts of the U.S., and in the Philippines. They also teach workshops and run a summer arts camp in the Niagara region for children ages 9-18.

Each ballet the company performs is original and combines dance with Scripture and poetry or narrative, and often live music as well. Currey says, "Some of our most memorable productions have been *Kyrie*, which tells the story of redemption from the Garden of Eden to the Resurrection, *The Christmas Chest* and the short piece, *A Celtic Prayer*. Currently, *Ode to the Broken* is our most popular production."

Currey adds, "We occasionally get the chance to do something really unusual as well. Rachel's aunt and uncle are adopting a little girl with severe disabilities from the Ukraine - her name is Katya - and they asked us to perform at a fundraiser. We were able to put together a full 45 minute ballet that told Katya's story and wove in Scripture about adoption and God's heart for us."

The participants in the various performances vary from as few as two to as many as 10, including some of Currey's siblings. Currey says, "Our biggest recent change has been adding Mercy Hope to our team. She's a speaker who shares her testimony in *Ode to the Broken*."

### Artful impact

Audiences have responded "extraordinarily well" to Soli Deo Gloria's performances. Viewers are diverse, from members of church congregations to guests from a women's shelter, but all have appreciated the artistic beauty and message of each ballet. "Some of our favourite responses tend to come from men," Currey says. "They often say, 'I'm not usually a fan of ballet, but....' It makes us laugh and encourages us to keep sharing what we do with all kinds of people!"

Currey and Starr Thomson's ultimate goal is to glorify God. Currey explains, "We're always happiest when people respond, not just to the artistic factors, but to God himself. During the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, we spent some time hanging out and performing at a women's day shelter called the Great Room. One of our pieces there was a short interpretive production called *Dream* which is primarily about deliverance. One of the women told us that *Dream* was the final push she needed to get into rehab and start rebuilding her life. That's the kind of response that makes our whole ministry worthwhile." >

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Features

# Mercy Hope's Story of mercy and hope

**Sonya VanderVeen Feddema**

Several months ago, I had the privilege of watching *Ode to the Broken*, a ballet performed by Soli Deo Gloria Ballet's Carolyn Currey and Rachel Starr Thomson. The program included the testimony of Mercy Hope, 30, who has, by God's grace, risen above a traumatic childhood and embraced a life of forgiveness and hope. And, yes, Mercy Hope is her real name!

**What was your childhood like?**

The first nine years of my life were dark. My family moved from house to house, continually being evicted. At times, we were taken to a shelter. We went through winters without heat. But the nightmare was that my stepfather was abusive. There were days where he held us hostage with a shotgun. I spent sleepless nights listening to things crashing against the walls downstairs and hoping against hope that he would not come up to my room. We lived in fear and instability.

**What role did Christians play in freeing your family from domestic violence?**

When I was nine years old, a church community halfway across the country learned of our situation through one of their members who had gotten to know my mom over the phone. They sent members to come help us move to a safe house and became our support system. They gave us a huge housewarming and stocked us with absolutely everything we needed because we did not have much. I was stunned by this love that welcomed us in.



Christian motivational speaker, Mercy Hope.

**How did you come to know God's love?**

I need to back up in my story. When I was very young, my siblings and I walked to a church where the Sunday school teacher taught the class that, "God is like your father and you can talk to him just like you would talk to your dad." I wondered if that meant God was like the biological dad who was seemingly indifferent and not there for me, or like my stepfather whom I dreaded. The teacher also gave an overview of heaven and hell and taught us "the sinner's prayer." From the information I gathered, mingled with my life experience, I deduced that God was a big tyrant, sitting on a throne of judgment with a huge club and that, when my stepfather succeeded in killing me, I would have to stand before God's throne as he laughed, beat

me with his club, and threw me into hell. So, I was terrified of dying and had an extremely warped view of God. Still, out of fear, I prayed "the sinner's prayer" nearly every night, just in case it worked.

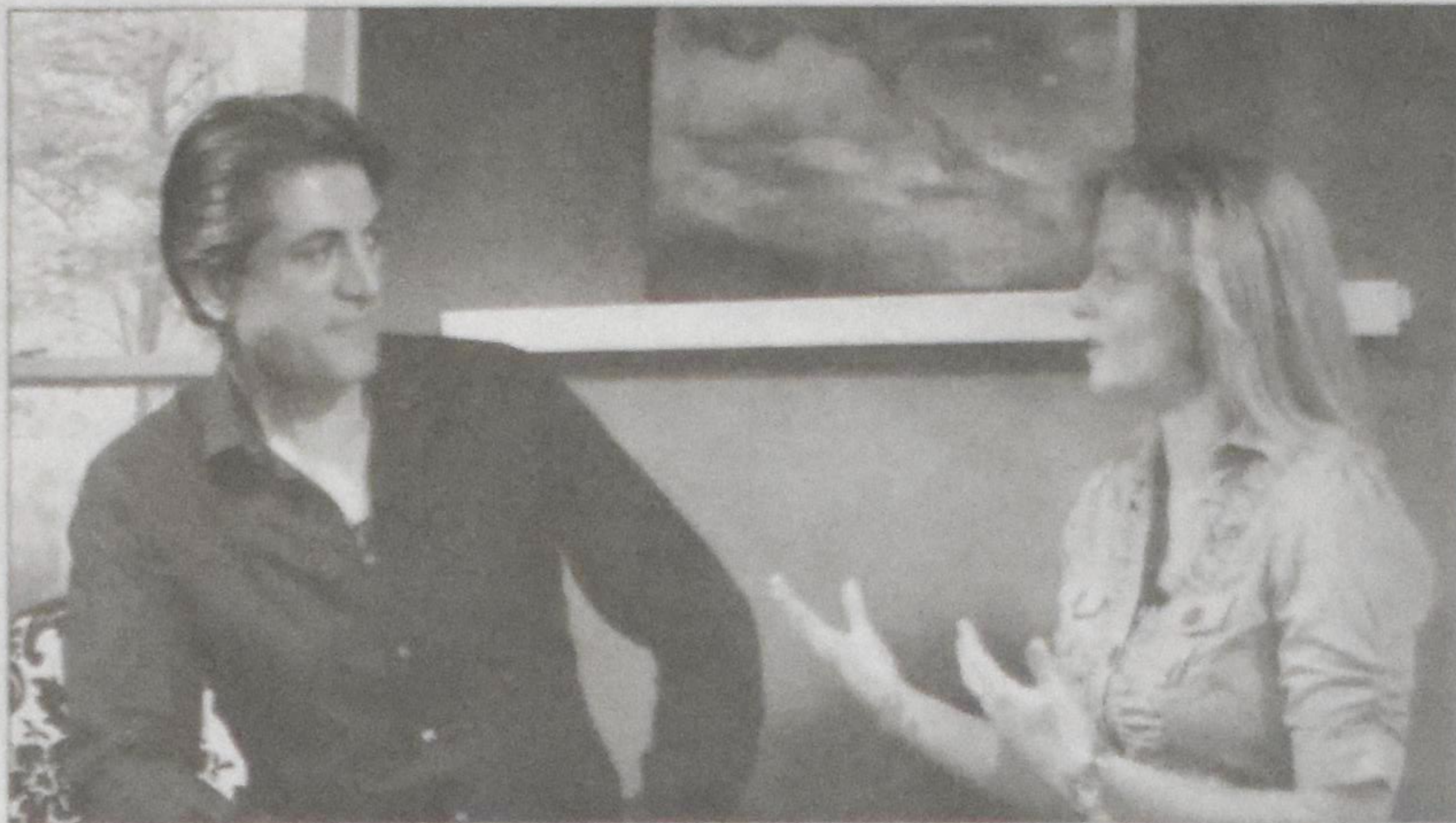
But when we were taken in by this other church, the fact that I felt so safe and cared for by those believers who loved Jesus caused me to wonder if I had been wrong about him. So, alone in a bedroom one afternoon, I cried out to him. I told him that I wanted to personally possess the love that I saw around me. He spoke to my heart and said, "I will be a Father to you." Simultaneously he touched me with his love. Those words, which at one time would have only aroused fear, now became the answer I longed for as I felt his love and healing pour all over me. I wept uncontrollably and I began to pray in a language that I did not understand, which I later learned was a work of the Holy Spirit. That was the moment, two decades ago, that started this lifelong journey of coming to know and love him.

**How have you experienced healing? What role has forgiveness played in your journey?**

Healing and forgiveness, in my experience, are an ongoing work of God's grace. But yes, I went through a process of forgiving my father for the feelings of abandonment and insecurity that resulted from my parents' divorce. I also forgave my stepfather for the years of pain. But just a couple of years ago, I took the extra step of contacting both of them and letting them know that they are forgiven. That gave me a new level of release and peace in my heart.

**What advice would you give to Christians who are trying to help and befriend people who have suffered from violence of any kind?**

Abuse inflicted by a human causes devastation to a person's identity. Having another human being come alongside and value, love and affirm is very critical in the healing process. Do not be afraid to reach out and touch their pain. Listen to their stories. Be patient. Be persistent in love. Encourage their future. Speak life, truth and hope over their lives. If they are dealing with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, they will need even more patience and for someone to "have their back," so that they feel safe and secure. But always claim Jesus Christ as the only Saviour and, when possible, bring other believers around the



Mercy conducting a FaithTalks interview.

people you are reaching out to. This helps avoid co-dependency that is unhealthy and counterproductive.

**When speaking to different groups, what topics do you address?**

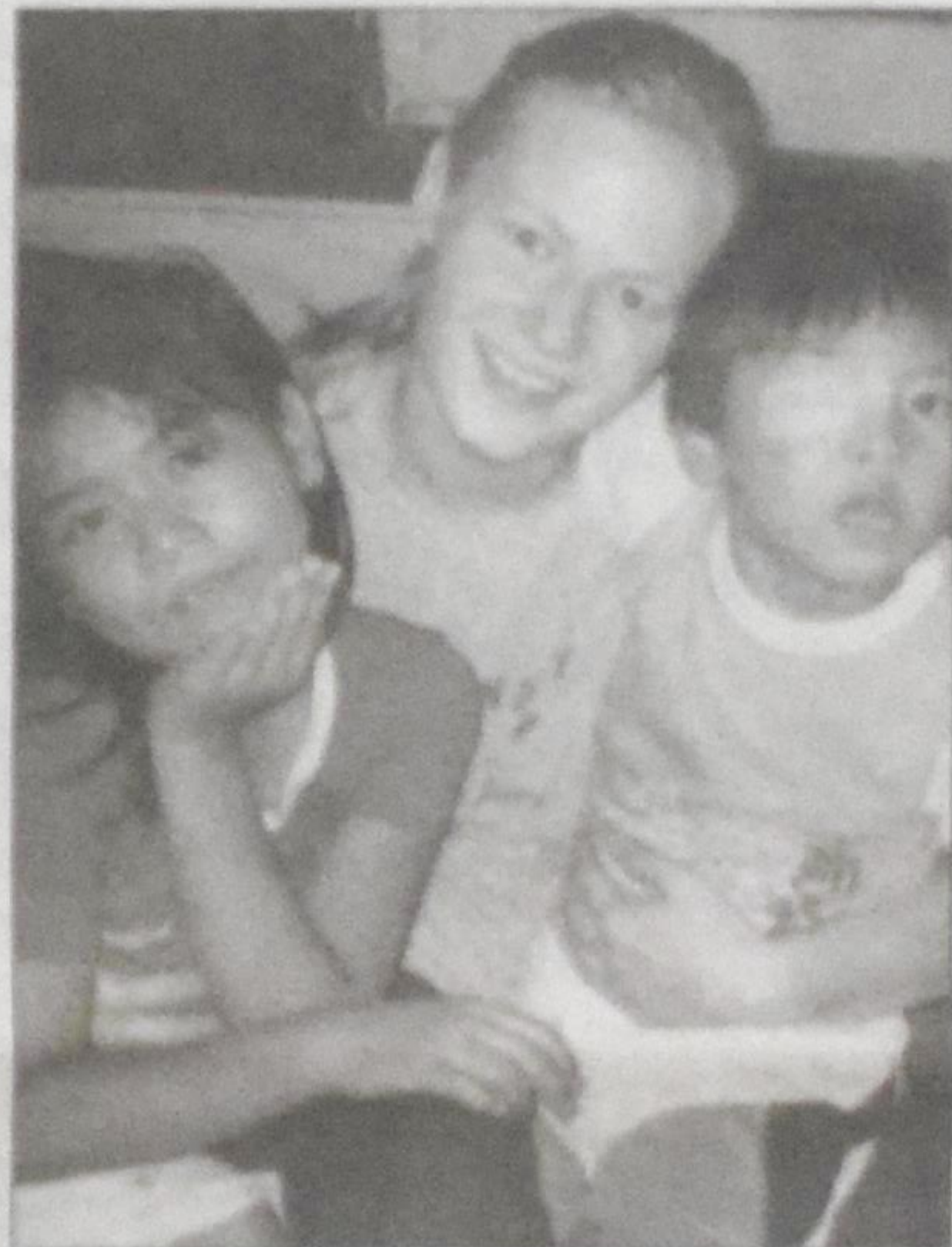
We have the power to build, create, and bring life, or to tear down, destroy, and bring death. Sadly, we live in a world where people are too often quick to speak negativity, while failing to really see and hear. The result is a world full of people who do not know who they are, or could become, in Christ. I love helping people see the world, other people, God and themselves from a higher perspective. From youth to parents, homeless people to business executives, I love equipping world-changers for the kingdom of Christ!

**How did you become involved with *Ode to the Broken*?**

Last fall, I was invited to speak for Soli Deo Gloria Ballet's Arts Camp. I had no idea prior to this camp that ballet could be such a powerful art form! As I watched Carolyn Currey dance and teach her students at the camp, my eyes were opened to how beautifully and effectively dance can convey a message. Seeing ballet done with such excellence for the glory of Christ alone, was like awakening to a whole other realm of communication, ministry and evangelism. So, when I was asked to consider consulting with them as they put together *Ode to the Broken*, I agreed. But little did I know that I would be a central part of *Ode to the Broken* and end up spending months of my life touring, even overseas, with a ballet company as a way to share the story of redemption that can only come through Jesus Christ.

**Describe your most memorable experience on your recent tour to the Philippines with *Ode to the Broken*.**

It was so awesome to see girls, once abandoned, sexually abused, wounded and overlooked, now feeling special and valued as Carolyn taught them ballet. It



Mercy in the Philippines with the Soli Deo Gloria Ballet tour.

was a dream come true for so many of them because ballet seemed out of reach, an art form for rich families only. This certainly added credibility to my message to them that they each have a place in God's story. They hung on every word.

**After experiencing so much brokenness, where do you find community now?**

When I am home in North Carolina, I attend Morningstar Fellowship and hang out with a great group of sisters in Christ locally. When I travel, I touch base with my friends from coast to coast who are an extended community for me. I am richly blessed with people who invest in me and those for whom I would do anything. The free-flow of encouragement and accountability is a gift!

**What are your plans for the future?**

To continue to love and be loved. Jesus and people are my main focus. Unless the Lord unexpectedly changes my perspective, I plan to continue in what I am doing right now, as an interviewer for **FaithTalks.com**, writing, speaking, one-on-one biblical counseling, mentoring girls, enjoying prophetic worship and getting to the ocean as often as I can.



## Features

Canadian chiaroscuro: *A Blessed Snarl*

Cathy Smith

The epigraph of Samuel Thomas Martin's novel, *A Blessed Snarl*, lays down the paradox in one thick stroke: "In Newfoundland nature is a blessed snarl, humans an imposition." For Martin's characters, yes, Newfoundland is a knife, scaling them like so many "fish washed up on a rock," frantically flopping about for salvation. The Rock with its "fanged north coast" is a harsh landscape; the Atlantic, "terrifying, frothing where it gnaws at the jagged shoreline." This isn't Ontario, warns a cop: "You hit a moose here at that speed and its ass will take your head clear off." The austere topography becomes a metaphor for life, where characters and readers alike struggle to find hope in the darkness, where, as in one of Rembrandt's paintings, the flickering light of a candle seems a hopelessly frail defense against the gathering gloom.

Rev. Patrick Wiseman, "strangely sure-footed in his Sunday shoes," is as fervent as the original Irish saint. He moves his wife Anne and his son Hab from Ontario to Newfoundland to pastor a Pentecostal church in a suburb called, of all things, Paradise. His father-in-law, Gurney Gunther, also a preacher, tells Patrick, "Newfoundland was once the Pentecostal capital of Canada, you know," he himself having performed miracles of healing, including, it is said, having raised his daughter Anne from the dead. But as Patrick gets caught up in the busyness of *New Life Church*, his family falls apart, despite their faith heritage. Anne leaves him for a high school crush; Hab moves in

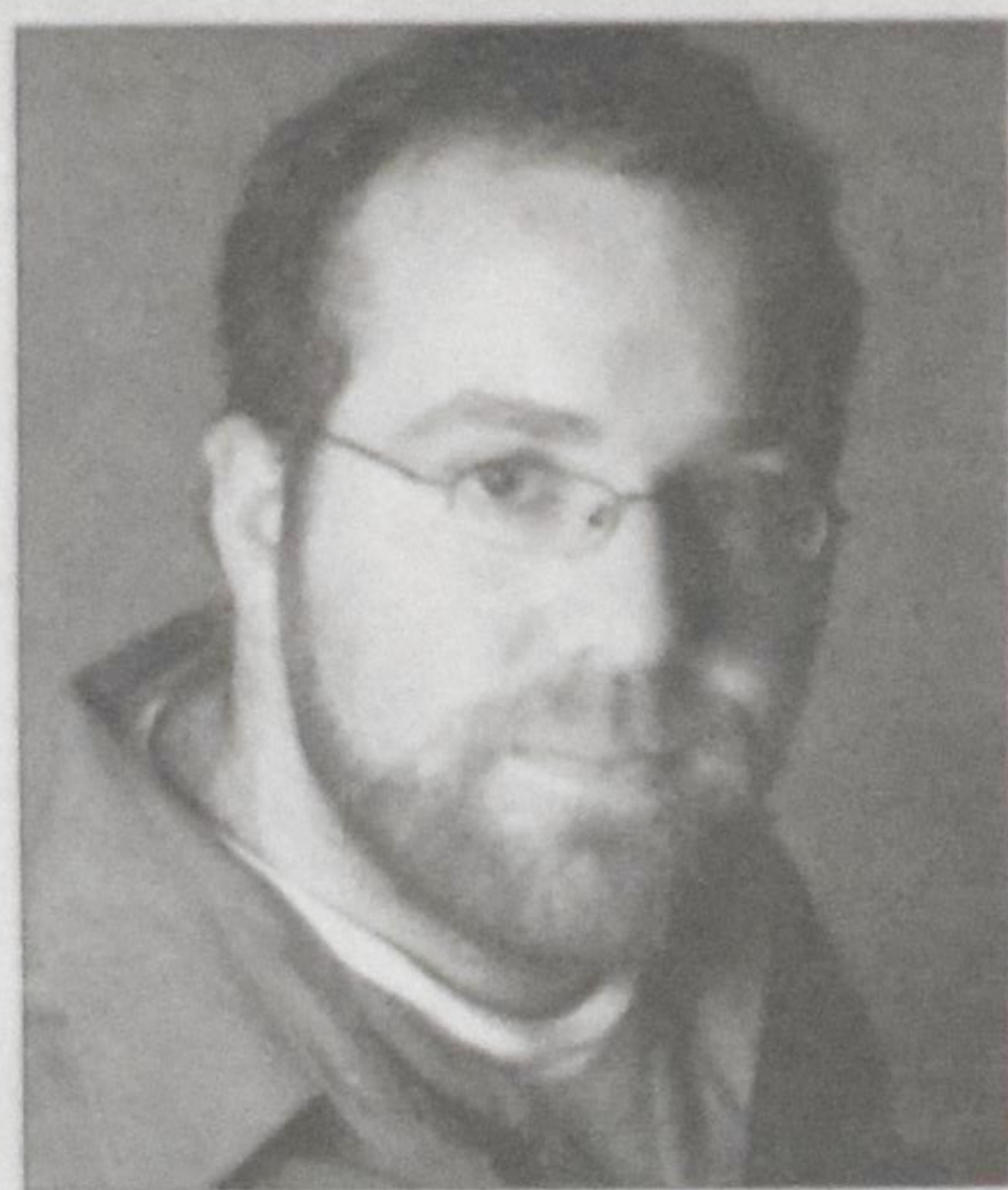
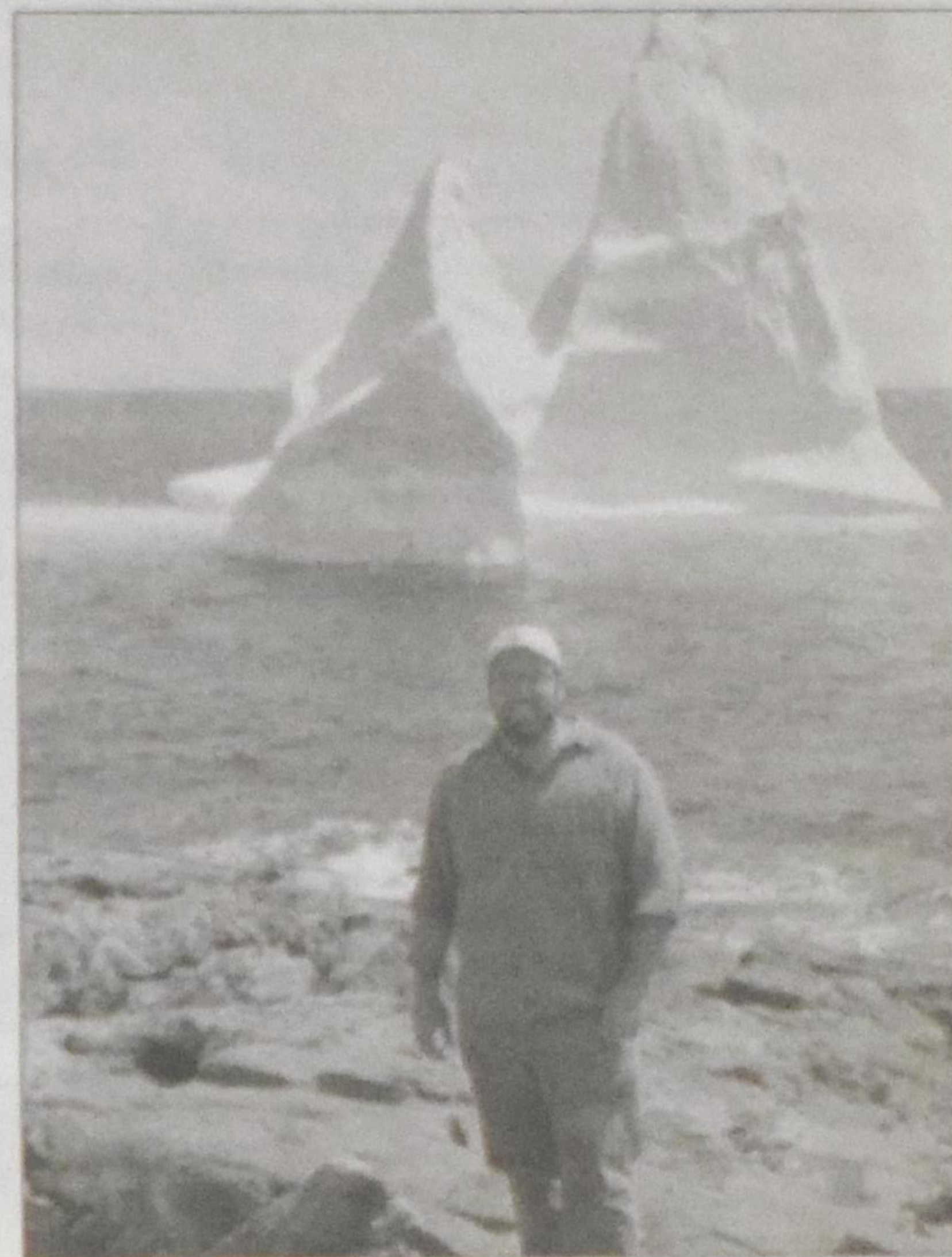
with his girlfriend Natalie. Patrick is left dazed, exiled by his own, like Jeremiah or David or Absalom, not able to make "sense of his life without seeing it enmeshed in the biblical story."

Natalie works in a group home, terrorized by a psychotic resident. She drinks and pops pills to stave off her anxiety and to deaden tragic memories. Her roommate Gerry, a writer, is also haunted by his history. Inflamed by those long-ago wounds, Gerry commits an appalling crime. Patrick's estranged father, Des, communes with the Virgin Mary in his cabin, her visage materializing from a creosote stain on the wall. An old secret excoriates his soul, the guilt still not expunged after decades of sobriety. But these characters are not grotesque; you sense that Martin pities them and is keenly aware of their worth, their individuality lovingly outlined like faces in a Van Gogh portrait.

Martin's debut work, *This Ramshackle Tabernacle*, was a finalist for the 2010 Winterset Award and for the 2011 ReLit Award for Short Fiction. *A Blessed Snarl*, his sophomore effort, corroborates his talent. There's careful weight in the description and dialogue, but the plot moves briskly through a typically Canadian ordinariness. Anne drives on the 401 from London towards Hamilton. Patrick, Hab and a stranger take shelter together during a vicious storm. Conversations are littered with the profanity you hear on the street. All so very Canuck.

Fair warning: the language offends. As it should.

See *Blessed Snarl*, p. 13 Author Samuel Thomas Martin.



## Q&amp;A

## WITH SAMUEL THOMAS MARTIN

Cathy Smith

As a Redeemer grad, Sam, many of our CC readers are following your writing career with interest. Can you bring us up to date on your life?

This has been a crazy year of firsts for me: *A Blessed Snarl* was my first novel;

my first writing residency was as the inaugural writer-in-residence in Deep Bay, Newfoundland, through Fogo Island Arts; I finished my Ph.D. dissertation and successfully defended it; I got my first (academic) job as an Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa; and Samantha and I bought our first house! I don't really feel like I've had time to breathe since this all started happening in January. And I don't think I'll be able to catch my breath until Christmas, what with the full teaching load. But it's been a wild run, and I feel truly blessed.

#### Are you already planning your next work in spite of these significant transitions?

I spent my time in Deep Bay (in-between buying a house over the internet, filling out immigration papers, planning courses, and finishing my dissertation) writing. So, I have a (somewhat) reliable plot map for the next novel and about 80 pages of drafted material. I've put the project on hold for a bit until I get my feet under me here at Northwestern. Right now I'm enjoying sitting back and watching young writers, who're sitting where I sat not too long ago, wrestle new worlds out of their minds and onto the page. It's exhilarating, and reinvigorating. My characters, however, are already starting to find me in my dreams and pester me when I'm marking.

#### *A Blessed Snarl* portrays the weaknesses and strengths of various Christian faith traditions from an informed and sympathetic vantage point. Can you share something of your own background? How does faith shape your life and writing today?

I grew up Pentecostal, attended a Reformed university, study writers in the Catholic intellectual tradition (and the occasional mystic), and I was most recently a small group leader in a Wesleyan Church plant in St. John's, Newfoundland. So I am a bit of a chameleon in terms of denominations. Because of that, I've been able to see inside a lot of faith perspectives and glimpse how other traditions are viewed and talked about from inside a particular community. I've witnessed how different ways of seeing God and the world are tangled and knotted, but I've also seen Christ's intricate weave in the mosaic. Though I tend to be a bit of an outsider, I know that it's good to feel at home in a tradition, in a community. But, in terms of fiction, I'm interested in the lives of people who don't fit a specific church; they don't fit but they can't free themselves of its gravity either. They're satellites, halfway between God and outer darkness. I'm obsessed with them.

#### There's a sensitive thread in the novel about art – photography,

#### visual art, sculpture. What's your relationship with art? How does art interact with literature?

There's a French theorist I loved called Jean Louis Chretien, and Chretien wrote a book called *Hand to Hand: Listening to the Work of Art*, and the first essay is this lovely wrestling with Delacroix's depiction of Jacob wrestling the angel. I read that after writing *A Blessed Snarl*, but he was describing the same grappling I experienced when looking at visual art, particularly by artists of Newfoundland and Labrador. When I look at a painting by Gerald Squires or a drawing or illumination by Boyd Warren Chubbs, I feel drawn in, yanked through the frame. I wanted to try and create that experience in the novel and within the novel, on surface and subterranean levels of the story. So, the characters view, at different times in the novel, the four artworks that title the four chapters. Readers get to actually see what the characters see. But the images, aside from being literally in the story, become part of the metaphoric fabric of the narrative because I layer the visual language of each piece into the metaphoric language of each chapter. That's all very theoretical-sounding, but essentially, I think art can speak if we can listen with our eyes and other senses. Art, like a good story, wrestles us out of ourselves and into another's world. Both can cripple, sure, but both can also bless.



## Features/Column

## From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til



Many modern people – including Christians – stumble over the disturbing biblical truth that we are either “sheep” or “goats” in relation to God; and that because “the goats” have rejected him they will suffer God’s wrath, not just for a while but eternally. In theological terms this is called *limited atonement* (the third point of Calvinism in the TULIP acronym).

Clark Pinnock (d. 2010), a Canadian theologian who moved from evangelicalism to “open theism,” wrote in 1990: “I was led to question the traditional belief in everlasting conscious torment because of moral revulsion and broader theological considerations, not first of all on scriptural grounds. It just does not make any sense to say that a God of love will torture people forever for sins done in the context of a finite life. . . . It’s time for evangelicals to come out and say that the biblical and morally appropriate doctrine of hell is annihilation, not everlasting torment” (*Theological Crossfire: An Evangelical/Liberal Dialogue*, Pinnock and Brown, p. 226-227). The Bible seriously differs.

Your reasons may seem altruistic, but if you ignore or explain away God’s judgment of unrepentant sinners – which God says

## ‘To live apart from God is death’

must be unending – you are not speaking the truth (much less “in love”). God consistently reveals himself in Scripture as holy, righteous, loving, merciful. There are no contradictions in the combination of those attributes. If you imagine you can worship a God who is only merciful and loving (by human definition), that God is not the self-revealed Creator-Savior-Redeemer of the Bible.

## Needed: True faith

In Heidelberg Catechism Q & A 20 we ask and confess: “Are all men saved through Christ just as we all were lost through Adam? *No. Only those are saved who by true faith are grafted into Christ and accept all his blessings.*” In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus preaches the uncomfortable truth that the road to destruction is broad, and wide its gate; and conversely, “small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life” (Matt. 7:14). Jesus, Lamb of God from the foundation of the world, knew his impending death would be sufficient to save every human being. But he also knew that not many would believe. In John’s gospel Jesus says he was not sent to condemn the world. God doesn’t want any to perish, but if we self-centred sinners reject the saving Light who came into the world as “God’s one and only Son,” then

we “stand condemned already,” Jesus says.

While Jesus’ death was sufficient to save all, Christ laid down his life for his *friends*, his Bride, his Body, those in whom the Spirit has overcome resistance to his grace. He saved a people: “my sheep who hear my voice.” Believers’ sin has been punished in Christ, not simply averted or ignored. “God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

## Drinking the wine of God’s fury

We like to think of our Savior as meek, gentle. He is – when we need meekness and gentleness. But the risen, reigning Christ appears to the elderly John on Patmos in a startling, altogether different manner: he is dressed in human clothing (as a “son of man”) but has snow white hair, blazing eyes, feet like bronze glowing in a furnace and a voice like mighty rushing waters. And his message is chilling. Write this, he tells John: Everyone who “worships the beast” will “drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. The smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night. This calls for patient endurance on the part of

the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.” But “blessed are the dead who die in the Lord” (Rev. 14).

Even if you think that won’t be literal fire, that picture is terrifying. Jesus bore the fury of God against those who belittle and trample his glory; he absorbed our deserved judgment and became the supreme demonstration of God’s grace. But for those who have besmirched God’s glory and rejected his salvation those are the inevitable and necessary consequences. If we engage in wishful thinking about “universal atonement” (and fail to evangelize) it is tragic to the lost. If we soft-peddle hell – the reality of which Jesus himself speaks of repeatedly – we utterly trivialize his sacrifice for us, and we entirely misunderstand God’s character.

John Piper makes my final point for me: “What a difference it makes when one believes in hell – with trembling and with tears. There is a seriousness over all of life, and an urgency in all our endeavours, and a flavour of blood-earnestness that seasons everything and makes sin feel more sinful, and righteousness feel more righteous, and life feel more precious, and relationships feel more profound, and God appear more weighty.”

Marian Van Til (mvantil@roadrunner.com) is a former CC editor living in Youngstown, N.Y.

Blessed Snarl *continued from p. 12*

Wyndham Lewis once remarked testily, “If I write about a rotting hill, it’s because I despise rot.” Here, too, the blunt obscenities serve to confront, to underscore that something stinks. Similarly, Martin’s locales are unflinchingly gritty, degradation slouched up against libraries and coffeehouses. But, like overlapping leaflets on a graffitied wall, poignant questions about God are plastered on the same page as vulgarity and despair. And that could be the very blessing of the snarl. In trouble, you look for help. Hab pinpoints his own needs simply: “He wants to share a meal with people who sit around a table and talk. He wants a glass of wine, and for God to answer his prayers.”

## Literature as canvas

The novel is painterly, patiently-applied imagery colouring in the story behind the story. A fishing motif arises naturally from the East Coast setting. When Anne knocks on the front door of her Facebook lover, she is overcome, “like something gutting her, like a fillet knife in a fish’s belly.” When the rendezvous reveals a bitter truth, she “felt like a fish hooked through the gills. . . .” In happier times, she had taught her nephew Kyle to catch muskie, but once he had unexpectedly snagged a ling, a strange north-water cod that her father called a “dirty fish and not much sought after by *real* fishermen.” The battle to land that mystery fish is an iconic memory for Anne, but also for the reader who catches traces of Jesus inviting fishermen to be “fishers of men,” faint suggestions of just how “dirty” those fish are, how nasty the fight to reel them in.

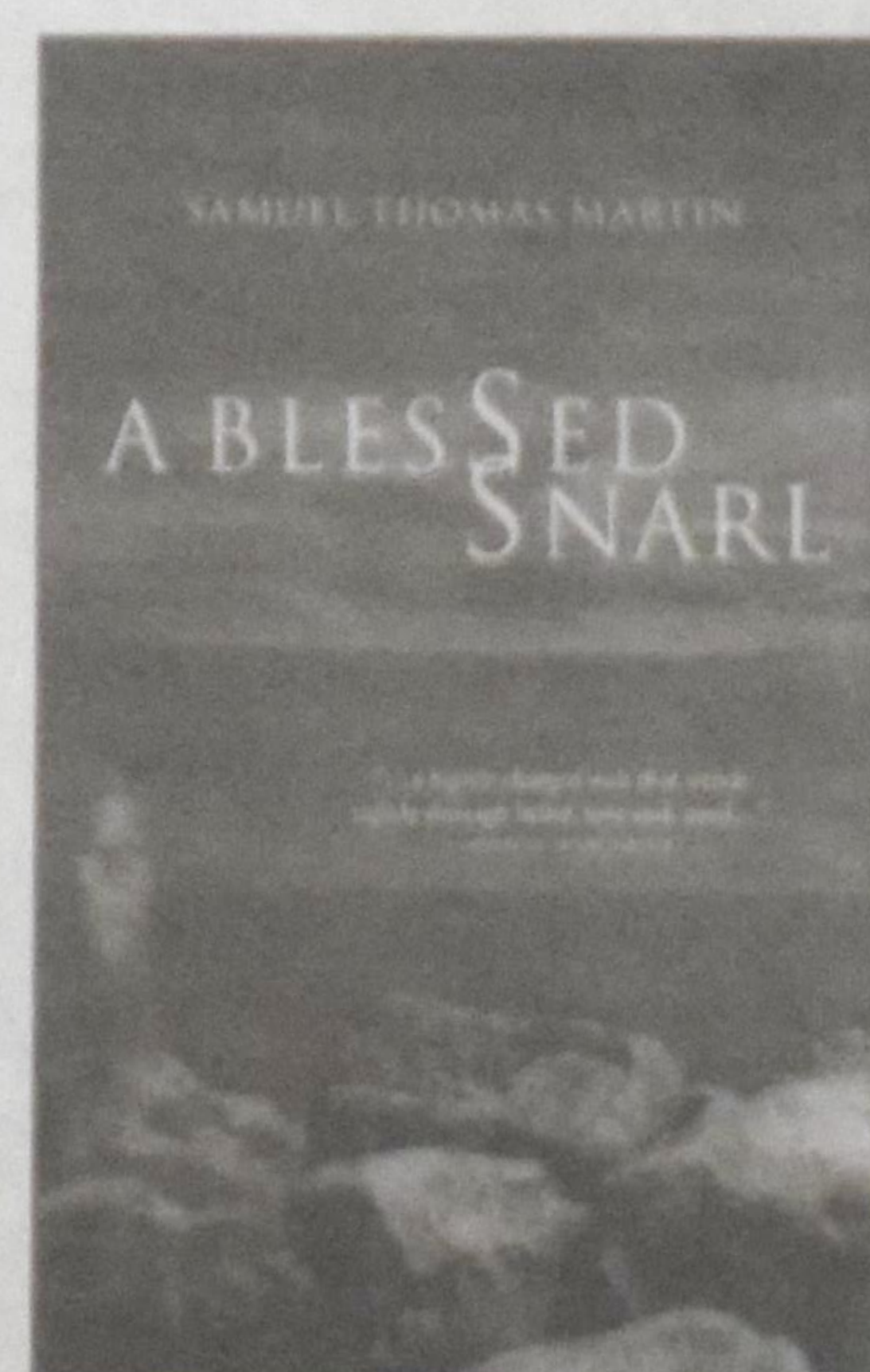
Fire is another evocative image, one that mesmerizes Natalie as a photographer. But after she survives a harrowing tenement blaze in which 23 lives are lost, she becomes unhinged: “It seems unreal, the fire, even now, after replaying it over and over in her head, trying to separate it from her imaginings of Hell and her ten thousand photos,

lost, of fire and furious light.” She recalls that it happened on Ash Wednesday, thousands walking the streets of Toronto “marked with the sign of the cross.” Again, obliquely, Jesus is present, an uncomfortable juxtaposition. Christ and crisis, side by side.

As a child Natalie had once heard Gurney Gunther preach about “fighting fire with fire,” contrasting “Holy Spirit fire that purifies against hellfire that destroys.” River, her schizoid client, is a pyromaniac who’s already burned up a shed and plans to do worse. Natalie gets twisted up in his malevolence. And there’s Martin’s subtlety again – nudging us to see in that bond between Natalie and River our own kinship with the damaged and the hurting. How different is Natalie from River, really? Gerry discovers that he shares the same last name as his victim, the neighbourhood drunk. How much separates these two characters from one another? The last chapter features a literal conflagration and a whisper of rebirth. The name Natalie, after all, comes from the Latin word for “Christmas Day.”

I’m capable of being critical. Friends who raved about *The Help* were surprised to learn that I was blasé about it. I loved Mary Lawson’s first book, *Crow Lake*; I found her second, *The Other Side of the Bridge*, predictable and disappointing. But when I read a thoughtful novel like *A Blessed Snarl*, I simply stand and applaud. I might even be tempted to call Martin’s accomplishment *anointed*.

Cathy Smith (cathy@christiancourier.ca) is features editor with CC. She lives in Wyoming, Ont.



A Blessed Snarl available through [www.breakwaterbooks.com](http://www.breakwaterbooks.com) or call 1-800-563-3333. Also available at Amazon.ca.



## Columns

## Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove



## When prayer is not enough

*When life becomes too much for us and we don't know where to turn, we often cry out to God for help. But God keeps silent and nothing changes. We ask ourselves why would God let us hit one wall after another? Why does he not help us get a better grasp on life? We are in so much pain. Eventually, having exhausted all avenues, we collapse in a heap and it finally dawns on us, we need to look in the mirror and take responsibility for our own life.*

**Q** I am a 21 year old woman who has just graduated from college, on the brink of a rewarding career in accounting. I was recently offered a position with a local and well-known accounting firm after only one interview. I know I present myself as being put together and ambitious. Unfortunately, this view is so far from the truth it boggles my mind. In reality, I have been suffering from bulimia for close to two years. I have kept this disorder a secret from family and friends, even though I have been living in a small basement suite in my parents' home. But now that I have a good job, I am thinking of moving into an apartment of my own. At the same time, I hesitate to take this step because I will be more isolated from loved ones. I am scared my disorder will balloon to such a degree I will be incapable of reigning in my destructive habits. I am ashamed of what I am doing to myself and have prayed endlessly for healing. My parents and siblings are very upright, "no nonsense" people and I cannot confide in them. I know I need help, but I also need supportive people around me.

**A** You are courageous to come out of the bulimia closet. You are also smart. You acknowledge you need help – an important stepping stone on the road to recovery. Bulimia is a serious disorder and can destroy your life if it is not dealt with. I understand your need for prayer, but the path to healing has to include medical intervention and psychological counseling. You can begin by praying for courage and comfort as you prepare yourself for this journey.

I suggest you connect with your physician or a community nurse that specializes in this disorder. Also connect with a pastor or another mature Christian you know who can be supportive and hold you accountable. Let them know how much food you eat, how often you throw up during the day and if you regularly use laxatives or any other kind of remedies that allow your food to move quickly through your digestive system.

Be very clear about your need for help and that you are willing to do whatever it takes to become healthy again. Do not rationalize nor justify your bulimia. Accept that you have this disorder.

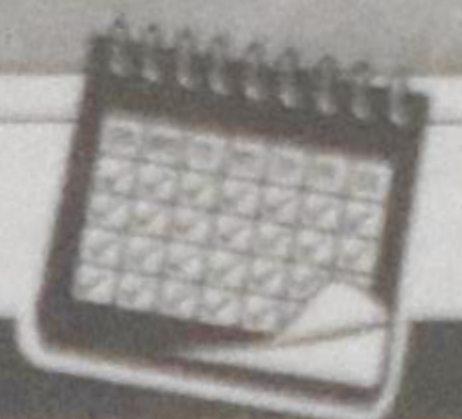
It's also helpful to become educated in this area using the internet: access reliable information as well as various types of treatments. Ask your doctor or call the local counseling association for a referral to a therapist who specializes in eating disorders, and be committed to work this through. You have much to live for and many women (and yes... some men) have overcome this illness. You do not need to feel ashamed for the rest of your life. Surround yourself with supportive people who have faith in you and pray diligently for courage and comfort.

*Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and member of the Fleetwood CRC.*



## Everyday Christian

Cathy Smith



*Gardening fosters a kinship with God, who planted a garden in Eden.*

## God in my garden



Gardening is the one thing I do for myself. I don't garden for food; I don't garden to improve our property's market value; I don't garden to impress the neighbours. I simply garden for my eyes – for an instinctual love of colour, texture, and shape. And in that joyful impulse to create something beautiful, a living composition, I discover a kinship with the Lord God himself who planted a garden in Eden. Gardening just might be the most devotional thing I do.

For me the proof of God could very well be the colour green. The balsam of my cedars turns acid-washed when wet, the lime of my citronelle heucheras flashes neon, the new growth on my Japanese barberry defines chartreuse. Every hue unfolds in the foliage of my garden – olive, sage, jade. But I also adore the "look at me" audacity of orange marigolds and red geraniums. Blue rings the accent bell – like the aptly-named morning glory.

But there's something about texture that also makes my throat constrict. Maidenhair grasses are rapier-thin, slicing the breeze with finesse. A stand of massive Chinese grass evokes a corralled cluster of javelins aiming skyward. At the opposite end of the spectrum are the soft and furry grasses. The kitten tails of purple fountain grass bounce playfully against the air. Hamlyn grass flaunts fuzzy caterpillars on stalks arrayed in a miniature carousel. Clusters of white phlox beckon like popcorn balls at the fair. Begonias border my beds, their waxy apple-green leaves and pert white blossoms tidily bundled, so many perfect bridal bouquets all in a row.

Wind and light are transformative. An April wind gusts, bending trees at the waist, and I see the Holy Spirit, invincible and irresistible. On a scorching motionless August day, the grainy heads of the Foerster Reed grasses still vibrate imperceptibly, and I see that same Spirit, covert, mysterious. When the summer sun spills its evening rays over the garden, everything is glazed, dripping with liquid incandescence, a baptism of light. The glossy wine-coloured leaves of the redbud cradle the glow, dark green veins holding the radiance like leaded stained glass windows. The smokebush ignites, maroon flaming to crimson. Japanese flame grass flourishes seedheads like burnished bronze standards. Lustrous white hosta blossoms nod and wink with a knowing air. God is here.

## A master designer

Love is made visible in work. I've turned over mountains of clay dirt, sweat dripping, blisters on my hands, gashes on my calves from rusty shovels. I've wrestled tangled roots out of the ground,

lugged rocks, shovelled mulch off the bed of our pickup truck, bundled branches and pruned hedges. I've had to conquer my fears to garden. I'm afraid of, in no particular order, birds, snakes, bats, voles, bees, wasps, mice and the occasional sneaky frog that suddenly hops away, centimetres from my face. Beauty comes at a price. It's unequivocally worth it. And that, too, makes me reflect on God and the price he paid to redeem his handiwork, love sown in sacrifice, the ultimate sacrifice of his only-begotten Son, but also the incremental sacrifices, watching his pristine creation daily wrung to tattered ugliness by sin.

I've learned something of that divine patience through gardening. This year I've nursed a Rheingold cedar that sustained significant winter damage. The blight was an eyesore, but rather than discarding the shrub, I kept watering and fertilizing, and waiting. It's coming back, slowly. I feel like God, who doesn't break a bruised reed but cherishes us despite our rot and mildew. We Christians often display glaring blots on our witness and character, but I don't despair. I've learned forbearance by tending this broken plant. God isn't finished with us. He's not finished with me. Having woven us in the depths of the earth, as the Psalmist says, his hand is still upon us.

I love the old dependables – the no-name hostas and faithful perennials that function as backdrop for the showier specimens. They also make me think of God's master design. There are always those individuals in the church or institutions in the broader kingdom that are in the foreground of service or acclaim, but the grinders have their integral place. The volunteer who stacks chairs after a meeting or the son who makes time to visit his mom in the nursing home are as beloved of God as the Rob Bells or Albert Mohlers who put Christianity on the front page.

Annuals, too, remind me of God's providence and planning. Petunias and impatiens add their giddy flamboyance to the garden for a brief season; then, in October, they are ruthlessly ripped out. In the face of the sorrow that Christians endure when churches or Christian schools close or ministries come to an end, annuals declare that passing splendour counts.

I'm well aware that this column is a bit anthropomorphically excessive, but as summer draws to a close, it's that once and future resurrection embedded in gardening that is the most extravagantly emblematic of all, that keeps young gardeners seeing visions and old gardeners dreaming dreams. Next spring, after the dead of winter, will come a triumphant and glorious rebirth, orange tulips dancing and yellow daffodils skipping, and I'll believe again and testify that God will redeem his Garden.



## Columns

Words from  
Wild Horses

Kenny Warkentin



The Lord spoke a profound word to me this past month, through a very innocent act done by my two-and-a-half year old. As I was getting ready to go out for a meeting, my daughter brought me a pair of shoes. She proudly carried them to my feet and promptly put them down right in front of me, saying "Daddy's shoes?"

I looked down and didn't see my shoes but the shoes of my wife. Red wedges, definitely not mine. Phoebe waited there patiently for me to put them on. I told her that these shoes would not fit Daddy and that they weren't mine but Mommy's. She didn't move. I showed her by slipping my bare feet into them that my feet were too big. My toes fit, but my heels hung a good three inches off the back. She still didn't move. I showed her again that these were not a good fit. Sure, I could walk in them and get around in them, but the shoes were not mine.

## New shoes

So I took the wedges off, put them in the closet and grabbed my shoes. These fit perfectly. Little did Phoebe or I know the significance of her innocent action, or what God would remind me of later that week. I left it at that and went to my meeting, not thinking twice about those shoes or Phoebe's insistence that those red wedges were Daddy's.

That week in church I was playing piano for the worship team, and as we were singing I got a picture of those red wedges and my feet in them. I was taken aback, although I kept playing. I then felt the Lord say to me that he has given me new shoes, ones that fit my feet perfectly, and that in these shoes I can stand upright and strong, as a man capable of being a husband, father, brother and son. I was reminded of the time when I used to wear shoes like my wife's. When my masculinity was so broken and my identity marred due to circumstances in my childhood. I had always secretly hoped that I could eventually become a woman. I was reminded of the times I used to wear

my mom's shoes, pretending to be just like her. I wished that I could wear shoes like that without shame or fear of being ridiculed and called names. I had always felt odd in my skin, in my gender, and even though at the time I was comfortable being gay, my secret longing was that I could eventually have gender reassignment surgery and that would be the final answer for this empty feeling inside.

## More than footwear

God met me in a profound way, which stopped that process from ever happening. My masculinity and sense of gender healed through submitting my life over to God. He set things in order so that I can stand secure in who I am clearly designed to be. I am grateful to God as I look at my life and all that he has done and blessed me with. Without him, my life could have looked very different than what it is today.

Those shoes reminded me of my past, but the greater reminder was God saying that he has given me new shoes, a new

identity, one that he had intended from the beginning when he knit me together in my mother's womb. These new shoes fit and the other ones never did. No matter what I did, those red wedges could never quite match the DNA of my feet. I felt like God was speaking this as a reminder to me, but also to all of us. I walked many years in the wrong shoes, even though God had something better for me.

And he has the same gift for all of us. He calls each one of us to take off the shoes that don't fit and allow him to give us the right-sized shoes. New shoes, ready for us to walk in the fullness of who we were created to be all along.

Are you ready to take off your shoes? Because God, your father who knew you before anyone else did, is ready to give you ones that fit perfectly.

Kenny Warkentin (kenny66@gmail.com) works full time as an urban missionary with Living Waters Canada and is an artist and musician. He lives in Winnipeg with his wife and daughter.

## Our World Today

Bert Hielema



My grandparents on both sides were elders in the *Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk* in Kornhorn, Groningen. If a nap was more seductive than the sermon during the after-

noon church service, my grandfather – a dairy farmer whose name I share – would resolutely stand up so not to succumb to an unholy bit of shut-eye. Yes, my parents, my wife – a minister's daughter! – and I have our roots in what here is called the Netherlands Reformed Church, better known as the heaven-fanatic, very conservative, black-stockings church. The last words my late older brother said to me were, "We will see each other again in heaven." Indeed, my background is convincingly pious.

I was slated to become a minister, and was sent after grade school to the minister/doctor/lawyer preparatory school, the Christian Gymnasium: six grades with some 100 students in total, almost all male. I still have a picture of the grade five class: 13 young men 18 to 20 years old, all in suits and ties. Besides Latin, Greek, four European languages and six mathematical subjects, the school taught me discipline.

No, I did not become a minister. Instead I moved to Canada in 1951, after serving a short time in the military. I could have become an air force pilot, but my father refused to give his approval.

Independence categorizes me. Within a year in Canada I was my own boss, selling insurance. I formed my own agency

in 1957 and became a real estate broker in 1965, the same year I was chairman of the Young People convention in Niagara Falls with the motto "Alive for Christ in '65." I was always active in something: school boards, Ontario Alliance, church as an elder. In 1959 when I saw a client die of lung cancer I decided to quit smoking and take up running. Ever since then running has been part of my life.

1972 was for me a turning point. Three books changed my life: Lappe's *Diet for a small planet*, Teller's *Sterven . . . en dan? (After death . . . what?)*, and the Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth*.

Lappe's book convinced us to become vegetarian. Teller's book made me see the importance of the earth as our eternal destination, and the Club of Rome taught me that we live in a finite world.

The church? I still love it, but have had my disagreements there. I remember speaking at a chapel service at Beacon Christian High School in St. Catharines right after I had seen the light about creation. I wanted to share that not heaven but the earth needed our total devotion. My minister was also in the audience, disagreeing so much that he sent a letter to all parents. Later he wanted to discipline me. Fortunately he left the denomination.

## Smaller footprint

He was one reason why, in 1975, we sold our house and business and moved to Tweed, Ontario, far away from it all. I also wanted to use less of earth's resources. We

## Where do I come from?



The south-facing side of the Hielema's energy efficient house.

bought 50 acres from friends and built into a southerly slope an energy efficient house, two storeys on the south side with large windows on both floors, and one storey on the north with only one small window. I even made insulated shutters for the windows, as glass is a very poor insulator.

Again I created my own job. Living on savings, I used my time to qualify as a real estate appraiser, taking courses at Trent, Queen's and York Universities and preparing three master appraisals of more than 100 pages each, one on a single family dwelling, another on apartment complex and a third on an industrial building, all required to become an accredited appraiser. In 1978 I had all my qualifications and launched Hastings Appraisal Services, subsequently hiring residential appraisers, one for South Hastings County, one to cover Central Hastings and another for North Hastings. I did all the commercial stuff: an airport, river dams, the entire Bruce Peninsula for an Indian land claim (500,000 acres), lots of

work for Public Works Canada, as well as a uranium mine with 4,500 acres and numerous summer camps, grocery stores, hotels, schools, you name it.

When I sold out in 1993, I installed 10 solar panels and expanded my garden, converting the soil from pure sand to something fertile, wheelbarrow by wheelbarrow, carting from a neighbour's yard pure precious black manure and also working in our compost. I grow much of what we eat and bike to town (11 km) daily. In June I ran a 10 km race in 1.05 hour. We grind our own flour with an electric mill, buying the kernels from Grain Processors, where we also obtain oat flakes and other bulk foods. We bake bread.

I try to work out my salvation with fear and trembling, fully realizing that this path is different for each person.

This column can also be found on [hieleva.ca/blog](http://hieleva.ca/blog). His e-mail is [bert@hieleva.ca](mailto:bert@hieleva.ca).



## News

# Christian business federation spreads like wildfire

Canadian Christian  
Business Federation

**ccbf**

Christian business leaders. Connected

## Keith Knight

What a ride!

The Canadian Christian Business Federation (CCBF) is spreading across Canada like a Prairie wildfire. Two years ago there were eight local chapters – groups of Christian business leaders meeting monthly over breakfast to talk about business from a biblical perspective. Today there are 24 groups of men and women, stretching from Ontario to Vancouver, and more than 2,000 business leaders who are connected to each other.

The CCBF began 28 years ago, born of Reformed roots. In fact, it is formally incorporated as the Reformed Christian Business and Professional Association. Interestingly, today's growth comes from beyond the traditional Reformed roots. Evangelicals, Mennonites, Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians and a host of other denominations are represented among the membership.

The attraction? It's two-fold. First, there is a passionate desire for Christians involved in business to want to connect with each other for mutual support and encouragement. Secondly, there is a strong focus on a biblical approach to business. Each group – including more recent ones in Winnipeg, Edmonton, Chilliwack, Abbotsford and Langley – use a five-year "curriculum" based on the NIV Leadership Study Bible.

Month by month, the members gather to talk about integrity in business, how to approach risk-taking, long-range planning and the will of God, leadership development, humility.

Membership grows daily. There are weekly requests from members and others to create new chapters in their areas, and CCBF has to tell them simply to wait their turn.

## Great growth

God is providing a growing network of individuals who are volunteering their time to develop new chapters in their areas. Rodger Champagne of Chaplains Canada was appointed regional director for B.C.'s Fraser Valley, to oversee its development of groups. Dr. Lana Adeleye-Olusae oversees the development of chapters in Winnipeg and beyond.

One of the most exciting new initiatives is the plan to create one new chapter per month across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) for the next year. Jennifer Beale, a well-connected publicist in Toronto, has agreed to serve as regional director for the GTA and to focus on that initiative. After

working for a decade within the Toronto business community, she said there has been both a strong need and a void when it comes to an organized Christian approach to business. The CCBF, she says, is best positioned to fill that need. There is already a chapter in North York. Mississauga will become established in mid-October. Ajax and Newmarket are next. She says there are thousands of Christian business leaders in the GTA and they long to be part of a network of support.

A volunteer with Campaign Life Canada in the Ottawa Valley recently discovered the CCBF online and volunteered to help establish a new chapter or two in that area. That will happen in the fall.

And so it goes. What began with one person working part-time with a few local chapters has developed into a full-time ministry with a growing network of highly skilled and committed men and women, each of whom have caught the vision and seen the need for godly wisdom in the business world.

## Life-changing

Three new chapters were created in B.C.'s Fraser Valley at the end of May. Sixty-five people turned out for three consecutive mornings for breakfast meetings where I outlined CCBF's history and purpose.

Afterwards, a man from Vancouver said that his life had been changed by one of those meetings. He said, "When you mentioned that 'if you're involved in business, you're involved in ministry', you blew me away." He had grown up in the church, but he always viewed the work week as his time to make money and earn a living. He

said he never saw the connection between Sunday worship and Monday work.

That notion is inconceivable for Reformed Christians. But for many, the connection between faith and vocation is not only profound, it's life-changing. One recent member said that he is attracted to the CCBF because of its focus on "equipping."



The growth of the Canadian Christian Business Federation is attracting other organizations and institutions. Most significantly, a growing number of Christian universities and colleges are becoming members because they appreciate our focus on mentoring: connecting business students with Christian business leaders. Redeemer University College, The King's University College, Trinity Western University and, most recently, Tyndale College and Seminary are building connections with local business leaders. It is hoped that the CCBF develops a national network of Christian universities and colleges who can connect their business students in mentoring relationships with Christian business leaders.

This summer, the CCBF held a booth at the Summer Networking Bash for business professionals. One well-connected person looked across the room at the throngs of people and said, "I know pretty well every business represented here. The CEO of every one of those businesses is a Christian." That is the level of influence that we have as Christians in the marketplace. But for many of them, it is a lonely life. Many of them lack a support group, or a place where they can regularly get together with peers to talk about the difficulties they have as they try to connect their faith with their vocation.

Something delightful happens once new groups are established. Real people get together, they learn and grow together, and then they begin to talk about what they can do to make a difference. The Canadian Christian Business Federation provides the place where Christian men and women come together to meet and to be equipped ... so that they can together impact the marketplace.

Yes, this is quite a ride, and God has just begun.

Keith Knight is the executive director of the Canadian Christian Business Federation (ccbf.org), a former communication director of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and a former editor and owner of Christian Courier when it was still called Calvinist Contact.



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		6				3		
	9		2		1		4	
5	7						6	1
		5	4		6	7		
1								6
		8	1		3	4		
9	8						7	3
	2		6		8		5	
		7				8		

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## Classifieds

## Birthdays



## 100th birthday

We as a family were blessed to share a family reunion in August and that our father

## Peter C. Houtman

was there in good health, on the brink of his 100th birthday, Oct. 1.

Friends and family are invited to celebrate this milestone with him at an **open house** on Sunday September 30 from 2-4 pm at Bethel Evangelical Church in Three Hills, Alberta. Best wishes only.

For further information contact Bill Houtman (403) 226-0893 or Harry Houtman at [harry@crcextensionfund.org](mailto:harry@crcextensionfund.org)

Harry and Tine Houtman - Toronto, ON  
Joe and Cherie Houtman - Vernon, BC  
John and Linda Houtman - Whitewood, SK  
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With God's grace,

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will celebrate her 100th birthday on October 11 with her family.

Address: 535 - 10 William Morgan Dr.  
Toronto ON M4H 1E7

## 90th Birthday



## Derk Nanninga

Happy Birthday Dad (Opa)!  
Congratulations on your 90th birthday.

May God continue to lavish his love and blessing on you and mom over the years to come. We thank God for you and appreciate always living in your garden of love, encouragement, wisdom and prayers. We are who we are in part because of your love for us and your model of what it means to be a follower of Christ.

We invite friends to send a birthday greeting to Dad at  
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## Anniversary



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## Thank You

A sincere thank you to all who came out to our 50th anniversary open house, for the many cards we received and all those best wishes and kind words spoken. It was overwhelming, but so very much appreciated.

Praise be to the Lord!

Minne & Annie Van Der Molen  
791 Con 8 RR 1,  
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## Church Anniversaries

**Lucknow Community  
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Everyone is welcome.

**River Park CRC**  
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## VP Academic Search Committee

Mrs. Magda Beukes, Executive Assistant to the President  
Redeemer University College  
777 Garner Road E.  
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[vpacadsearch@redeemer.ca](mailto:vpacadsearch@redeemer.ca)

Redeemer University College offers equal employment opportunities to qualified applicants. In accordance with Canadian immigration requirements, Canadian citizens and permanent residents will be considered first for this position.



## Advertising

## Committee "Netherlands Bazaar" Christmas food parcels

The Christmas season will soon be upon us and once again the Committee Netherlands Bazaar is depending on your co-operation to successfully identify those families who will receive a Christmas food parcel. If you know of any family of Dutch heritage in Ontario, in extreme financial circumstances, we need to hear from you before Friday, November 16th, 2012. Our registered charitable standing was granted on the condition that all recipient needy families are of Dutch heritage. Even with this restriction we are hard pressed to meet the needs of those who qualify and each year we have to carefully select the needy who will receive support.

Please note that we must have specific information in order to send the appropriate food parcel, such as name(s) of recipient(s), address, contact person, ages of children, as well as the reason for aid. Also the telephone number of a contact person who can verify this information and the signature of the contact person are required. All submitted names

will be kept in strict confidence. The families who received a parcel last year will not automatically receive one this year. We require confirmation of their current circumstance. If you have questions, please contact: Ge Spaans 905-477-1243, Jannie Thomas 416-498-8706, Dia Pos 905-854-5102, Henny DeCloe 416-222-1677 or Nellie Kamerman 905-562-4619. Please forward information by Friday, November 16th, 2012 to: Mrs. G. Spaans

15 Pavillion Street, Unionville ON L3R 1N8  
Your assistance in reaching these Ontario families in real need is very much appreciated. Thank you for your ongoing support and co-operation.

Sincerely,  
Ge Spaans

Note: The date of next year's Netherlands Bazaar is on Oct. 5, 2013.



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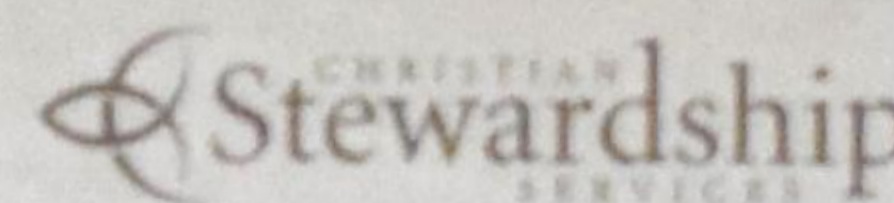
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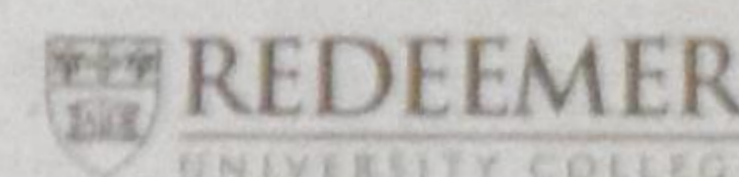
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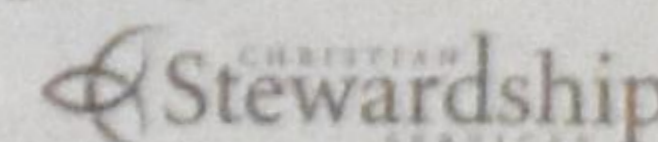


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## Events/Travel

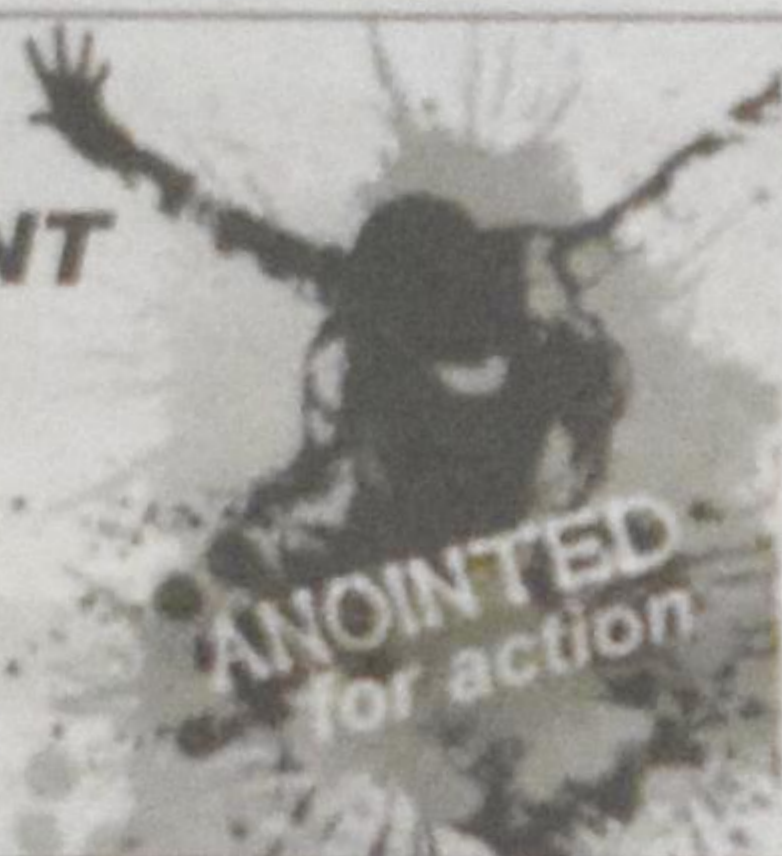
## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Sep 21** "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director. **Brampton**, Holland Christian Homes at 1:30 pm. See: [hollandchristianmalechoir.com](http://hollandchristianmalechoir.com).
- Sep 21** "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director and "Liberation Choir" with Sharon Sandink director. **Georgetown** Christian Reformed Church at 8 pm.
- Sep 22** "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director. **Durham** Christian Homes, **Whitby** at 1:30 pm. See: [hollandchristianmalechoir.com](http://hollandchristianmalechoir.com).
- Sep 24** "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp. **First Christian Reformed Church, Kingston**, at 8 pm. See: [www.hollandchristianmalechoir.com](http://www.hollandchristianmalechoir.com).
- Sep 26** "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp and "The Ottawa Carleton Male Choir" with Margaret van Dyk as director. **Calvin Christian Reformed Church, Ottawa** at 8 pm. See: [hollandchristianmalechoir.com](http://hollandchristianmalechoir.com).
- Sep 27** "Good By Evening" "Holland Christian Male Choir" Freddy Veldkamp as director. **Cephas Christian Reformed Church, Peterborough** at 8 pm. More information: [hollandchristianmalechoir.com](http://hollandchristianmalechoir.com).
- Sep 30** River Park CRC, **Calgary**, Alberta, formerly known as First CRC, will celebrate 60 years of God's faithfulness at a special service at 10:00 am. 3818-14A St. SW.
- Oct 20** Day of Encouragement Theme: Anointed for Action. Registration opens at 8:15 AM. **Hamilton District Christian High School, 92 Glancaster Rd, Ancaster**. Info: [www.diaconalministries.com](http://www.diaconalministries.com). Email: [dayofencouragement@crca.org](mailto:dayofencouragement@crca.org) Ph: 905-336-0967 ext. 278
- Oct 21** Lucknow Community Christian Reformed Church of **Lucknow, Ont.**, Canada will celebrate 60 years of God's faithfulness with a Celebration Worship Service at 10:00 am. Everyone is welcome.
- Oct 28** Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster CRC** at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Herman Praamsma will be preaching. DVDs available.
- Nov 2** Christian Festival Concert 7:30 pm. **Roy Thomson Hall, Toronto**. See ad for more details.

## DAY OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Saturday,  
October 20, 2012

Hamilton District  
Christian High School,  
Ancaster, Ont.



### Information and Registration:

[www.diaconalministries.com](http://www.diaconalministries.com)

Email: [dayofencouragement@crca.org](mailto:dayofencouragement@crca.org)  
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The Day of Encouragement is an opportunity to be refreshed, renewed, equipped and encouraged, and is a wonderful opportunity for all ministry workers. With over 50 workshops, service sites and chatrooms, many areas of ministry are covered and there is something for everyone. The theme for this year, Anointed for Action, reminds us that God anoints us and gives us gifts and talents which we can joyfully use in His service.

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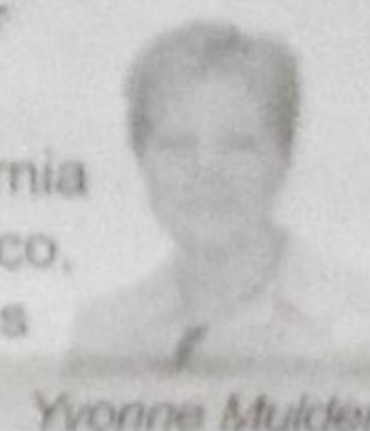
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## News

## Canadian artist sows seed in Colorado

Bert Witvoet

Floyd Elzinga has been producing steel art since he left the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax 17 years ago. True, his first project was a stone sculpture. But the stone cracked and spoiled his efforts. That made him turn towards steel as his prime medium – coated and uncoated steel, stainless steel or weathering steel, using limestone as a base if needed. Steel is forgiving, says Elzinga. You can bend it, cut it and weld it on again. And so his company “artifice” features a handsome catalogue showing hand-crafted home and gardening accessories (it can be accessed online at [artifice.brainmade.com](http://artifice.brainmade.com)).

During most of these years Elzinga has been the main breadwinner for his family – his wife Carolyn and he have two boys, Clay and Gavin. They live in the country on the escarpment outside of Beamsville and grow their own vegetables. It's not every artist that can “make it” on his chosen craft. Elzinga exhibits at important art shows, such as One of a Kind, Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibit, The Artist Project, all in Toronto, as well as in various museums and galleries. This is where he sells his pieces of art or gets his orders for future projects.

In the early days he used scrap metal a lot. Elzinga loves the natural feel of farm machinery. It keeps him close to the land. And rust for him is part of nature. But rust destroys and so he has turned to steel that protects his work of art, especially if it is placed outside and is subject to the elements of snow and rain. Some of his windswept trees remind the viewer of the Group of Seven. Elzinga believes that a Canadian artist cannot escape their influence if they work with the natural environment.

“I’ve been fascinated with seeds,” says Elzinga. “Seeds represent potential.” And so he loves to produce pine cones of various sizes. “A small pine cone resembles a grenade,” he adds. “But grenades are destructive and pine cones are life-giving.” He holds a grenade in



The nine-foot cone is ready to be shipped. Jarrod Hogeterp, Floyd Elzinga (l to r), Jeff Buikema (above).

his one hand and a cone in the other, and I am struck with the eerie resemblance. I trust that the grenade is not live anymore but would prefer if he felt like throwing something at me it would be the pine cone and not the grenade.

## Adding to creation

He offers a choice of custom-made pine cones anywhere between six inches to over six feet. But he and his wife were more than surprised earlier this year when an art consultant working for a family with a huge estate in Vail, Colorado, ordered the creation of three pine cones – one seven feet, one eight feet and one nine feet in length. The art consultant had found his work on the [floydelzinga.com](http://floydelzinga.com) website and liked what he saw. This was a first: such a large order from such a long distance. It took Elzinga three months to sculpt the cones. At the end, he had to order a flatbed truck to ship the items to Colorado. It was Elzinga that had suggested the size and the number of pieces – two cones stand up on steel bases anchored into cement blocks buried into the ground, one will lie down. How can outdoor art not be big considering it has to be dramatic enough to compete with the background of mountains, valleys and forests?

Elzinga loves the mathematical dimensions found in natural things such as flowers and cones. What he really loves is the concept of infinity. He talks about the Italian mathematician Leonardo of Pisa, known as Fibonacci, who developed the Fibonacci sequence. By definition, the first two numbers in the Fibonacci sequence are 0 and 1, and each subsequent number is the sum of the previous two (e.g. 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21 etc.) This

sequence appears in biological settings, such as branches in trees, the fruit spouts of a pineapple, the flowering of artichoke, an uncurling fern and the arrangement of a pine cone.

This kind of structure suggest a higher order to everything, meaning there are laws that things have to follow. “I like that combination of beauty and tension between organic and geometric, organic and industrial,” says Elzinga. His workshop certainly emphasizes the industrial with all its machinery, welding equipment, cutting machines and plenty of steel.

Elzinga wonders how he can take his work to the next level. What he made for his Colorado customer is decorative art, he says. In a way he prefers making art that makes people reflect on life. He wants to stay close to his Christian community and be an art evangelist without making his art preach. But some in his community want things for free, and that is a problem for any professional artist. He aspires to make complicated and potentially sophisticated art works but he does not want them to be devoid of the simple things – like fun or beauty – that make them accessible to the general public. He likes liturgical art because he can make use of a rich history of images. Some of his liturgical art can be seen in a number of Christian Reformed churches.

At the end of the interview I asked Elzinga if he would like to ride along with the truck driver transporting his cones to Vail, Colorado, and see his art installed. He says no. He is glad to have finished the job and looks forward to the next project.

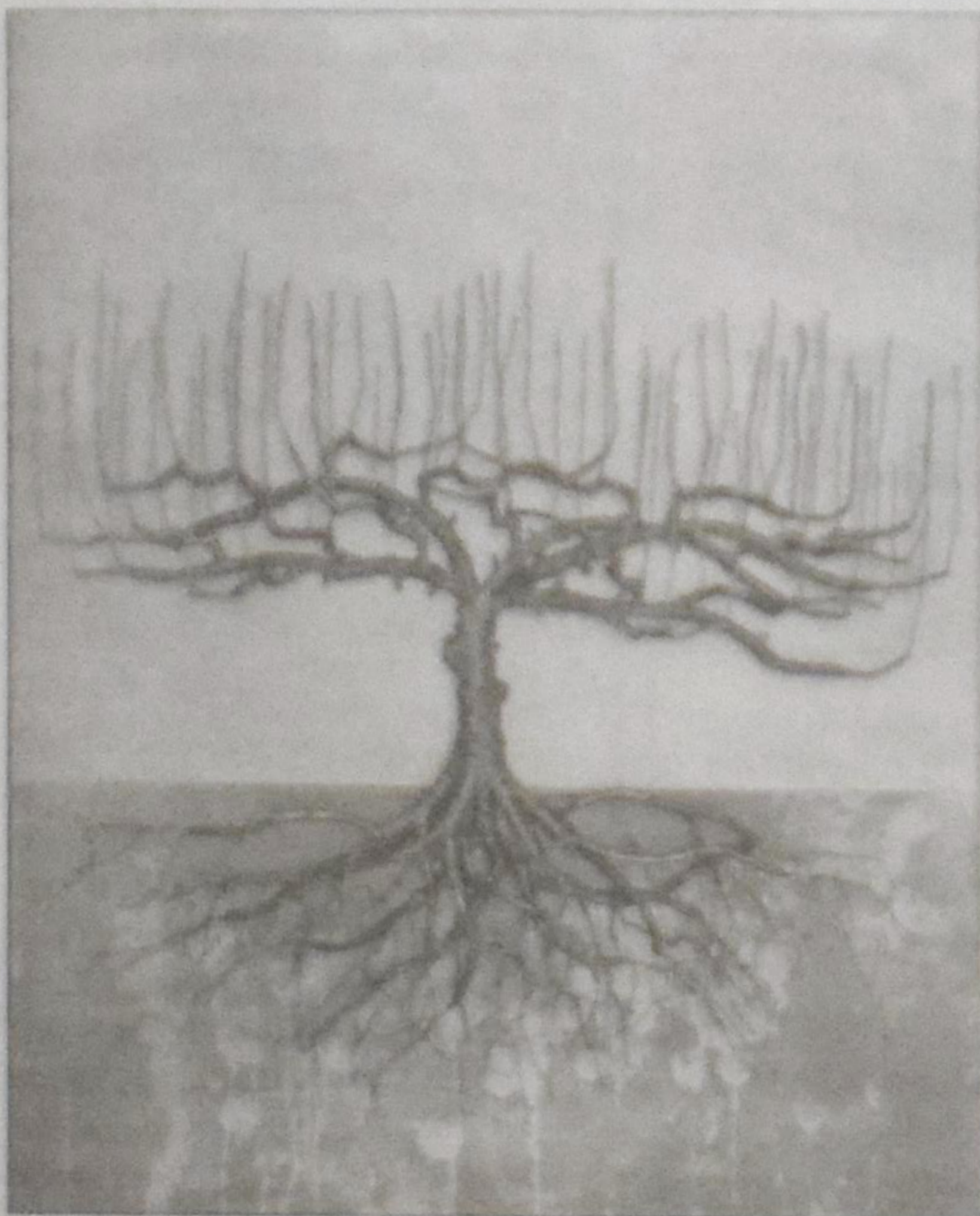
Bert Witvoet was an educator before he became editor of Calvinist Contact, later known as Christian Courier. He lives in St. Catharines, Ont., where for 10 years he was editor of the Christian Educators Journal. He is a contributing editor with CC.



## Honoured by the Queen

Have you or someone you know received one of Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee Medals? These commemorative medals are being handed out across the country to mark the 60th anniversary of the Queen's reign.

We know our subscribers are among those community leaders, mentors, entrepreneurs and volunteers being recognized throughout 2012. And we suspect that the humility of medal recipients might keep them from contacting CC, so if you know a recipient, then attend their medal-awarding ceremony, take a picture and email us with more details at [editor@christiancourier.ca](mailto:editor@christiancourier.ca).



Un-pruned apple tree.